DRAFT

ATHENS TOMORROW

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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1. INTRODUCTION

1-1 What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A Comprehensive Plan is a policy document that serves as a guide for public and private decision-making that affects a municipality's future growth and development for the next twenty years. It is a tool to translate the citizens' and leaders' vision into the various features that make up a community: residential areas, commercial areas, and public gathering spaces. A Comprehensive Plan guides not only the development, but the redevelopment of the city, and provides a blueprint for smart and responsible growth. A Comprehensive Plan's main objectives are to provide a framework for land use compatibility, efficiently plan for public services, and identify public and private investment opportunities.

The Athens TOMORROW Comprehensive Plan is a community-driven policy document of what the community envisions itself to be by 2040. This plan is the culmination of extensive community engagement and data analysis to provide a land use and development roadmap, including transportation, infrastructure, and land use policy.

1-2 How to Use this Plan

Athens TOMORROW is comprised of eight chapters. Each chapter analyzes current conditions, introduces relevant goals, and ends by outlining recommended actions to achieve these goals. The vision, goals, and actions developed in this plan will guide elected officials and city staff in making policy decisions affecting Athens' growth and the built environment.

Figure 1-1. Community Meeting

The citizens of Athens should use this plan as a resource to understand the community's priorities and continue to be engaged through the implementation of the plan. The development community should consult this document as a tool to determine where and how the City of Athens is targeting growth.

1-3 How is the Comprehensive Plan Implemented?

The Texas Local Government Code establishes the legal basis for cities to adopt Comprehensive Plans to plan for long-range development and promote the public health, safety, and welfare of the community. In 1987, the City of Athens adopted the first Comprehensive Plan, formerly known as the Development Plan, which was last updated in 1999. The 1999 Comprehensive Plan update has guided growth and development for over twenty years; therefore, an update to the Comprehensive Plan is needed to drive the next two decades of growth and development.

Figure 1-2. Athens City Hall

The goals and guiding principles established in this Comprehensive Plan will be used to update and revise the tools that the city uses to implement policy daily, which includes master plans, zoning and subdivision regulations, Capital Improvement Programs, and other specialized programs.

Master Plans

Master Plans implement the Comprehensive Plan by analyzing specific subject areas at a finer level of detail than is appropriate for a Comprehensive Plan. Master Plans provide recommendations on policy changes and capital improvements consistent with the Comprehensive Plan goals. While this Comprehensive Plan touches on multiple subject areas, such as parks and infrastructure, detailed master plans must be conducted to provide an in-depth analysis of the community's needs in these subject areas. The intent of the Comprehensive Plan is not to examine every topic in detail but to set a roadmap for the future.

Zoning and Subdivision Regulations

Zoning and subdivision regulations and other engineering standards determine appropriate land use designations, building form, and dimensional requirements for the overall quality of development that reflect the City of Athens' objectives. Zoning in the City of Athens begins with the Comprehensive Plan and is governed by the Athens Zoning Ordinance within the city limits. There are currently 17 zoning districts and 2 overlay districts in the city, including multiple residential districts, commercial districts, and other use districts. The subdivision regulations govern the subdivision and development of land within the city limits and the extraterritorial jurisdiction. The City Council makes decisions about development requests with recommendations from the Planning and Zoning Commission and city staff.

Capital Improvements Program

The Capital Improvements Program (CIP) is an essential implementation tool that consists of a multi-year plan that prioritizes capital improvement projects identified in the master plan process. Capital improvement projects may include street infrastructure, utility facilities, and the construction of public buildings. As the CIP is developed year to year, decisions regarding the prioritization of proposed capital improvements should consult the policy and management directives of this plan.

Other Guiding Documents

In addition to the above tools, there are many other specialized or project-specific documents that are created to address the unique needs of the City of Athens. For example, this could include documents such as the Athens Economic Development Corporation Action Plan or the Athens Downtown Master Plan.

1-4 Who is responsible for implementing the Comprehensive Plan?

The city's elected officials, various boards and commissions, and city staff all play a critical role in implementing the Comprehensive Plan.

City Council

City Council implements the plan when they set budgets and priorities each year for policy programs and capital improvement projects. With city staff guidance, they should consult the plan so that the projects meet the intent of the citizens that helped guide the goals in the plan.

Planning and Zoning Commission

The Planning and Zoning Commission reviews development proposals and makes recommendations to City Council based on the Comprehensive Plan's goals and policies.

City Staff

City staff ensures that development proposals, long-range master plans, and other projects follow the policies established in this document.

Overall, this plan should be referenced as much as possible by city officials, city administration, and the community to understand the priorities for the future.

2. COMMUNITY PROFILE

2-1 History

For this comprehensive plan to be successful, it is important to explore the history of Athens to understand the city's trajectory since its founding. Understanding a community's demographics is also essential as it shows where communities are now, where they have been, and where they are projected to grow.

Athens is located in east Texas, 73 miles southeast of Dallas in the center of Canton, Tyler, Palestine, and Corsicana. Athens was established in 1850 as the county seat of Henderson County and officially incorporated in 1856. After its incorporation, the city experienced a slow-growth period as there were no improved streets or sidewalks, and many existing buildings needed repair. In 1901, Athens was reincorporated, and elected officials began improving the city, increasing the population from 177 in 1859 to 4,764 in 1940.

As of 2020, the City of Athens has grown to a population of 12,857 and has many attractive destinations for existing residents and visitors. Destinations include the Henderson County Performing Arts Center, East Texas Arboretum, Lake Athens, Cain Recreation Center, The Texan, the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center, and approximately 200 acres of [illegible] and greenway space, all within a ten-minute drive from the city's quaint downtown.

The Dallas metro area's growth has traditionally expanded in a more northward direction, but in recent years, it has begun to shift to the east and south. While the cities of Terrell, Kaufman, and Ennis are most likely to feel the impact of this expansion first, Athens' relative proximity to the Dallas metro area means that an increase in growth rate over the next decade is likely. Growth will also likely occur northeast of Athens along the East Tyler Street/TX-31 East major corridor that connects Athens to Tyler, Texas. Development outside of Tyler is already occurring and will approach Athens in the future. Therefore, planning is critical to manage future growth and harness existing opportunities that will maximize economic development potential, increase the fiscal health of the city, provide for the need for increased services, maintain and improve infrastructure, and allow for the investment of growth opportunities.

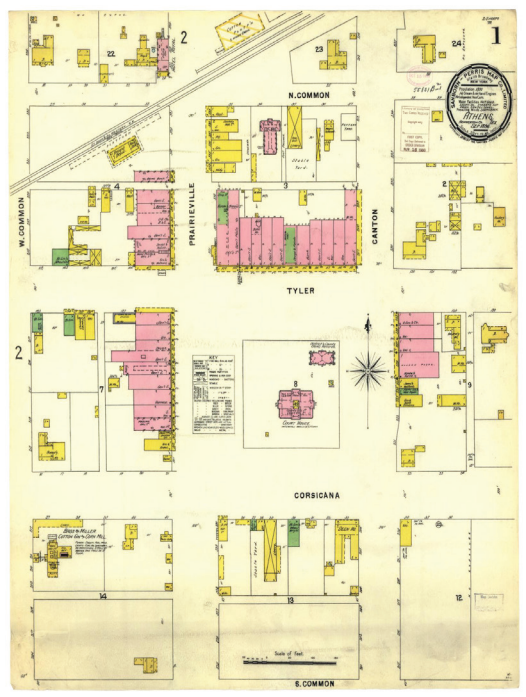

Figure 2-1. City of Athens Downtown Plan, 1896

Figure 2-2. Change in population from 2010 to 2020

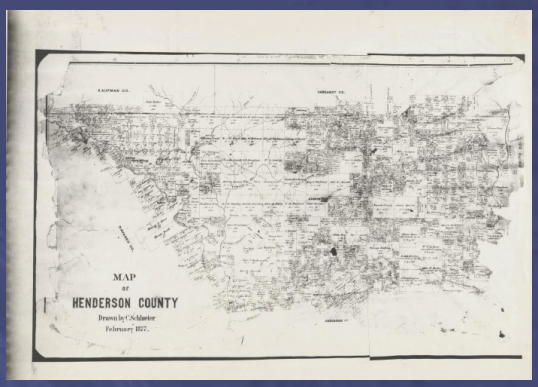

Figure 2-3. Henderson County Map, circa 1877

2-2 Demographics

Population Comparison of Cities near Athens and Population Trend within the Past 10 Years

According to the 2010 and 2020 Decennial Census data, Athens' population has increased slightly by 1.2%. This is a small percentage of change over a decade compared to other cities and counties nearby. However, it is important to consider that growth occurring outside city limits is not reflected in these numbers. As mentioned in the previous section, Athens and its ETJ needs to prepare for population growth over the next 20 years.

LABEL	2010	2020	PERCENT CHANGE
Athens City, Texas	12,710	12,857	1.2%
Canton City, Texas	3,581	4,229	18.1%
Ennis City, Texas	18,513	20,159	8.9%
Henderson County, Texas	78,532	82,150	4.6%
Kaufman City, Texas	6,703	6,797	1.4%
Trinidad City, Texas	886	860	-2.9%
Tyler City, Texas	96,900	105,995	9.4%

Table 2-1. Population Trend. Source: 2010 and 2020

Age Characteristics

Evaluating the population by age is important to ensure that a community has an appropriate mix of facilities, housing, and community services. According to the American Community Survey (ACS), the distribution of the population 65 and over has increased since 2011, which is consistent with the increased median age from 32.3 to 37.9. The population of 20-34 and 35-54 year olds remained static. The population over 65 has increased; therefore, an increase in senior living facilities, housing, and healthcare should be considered.

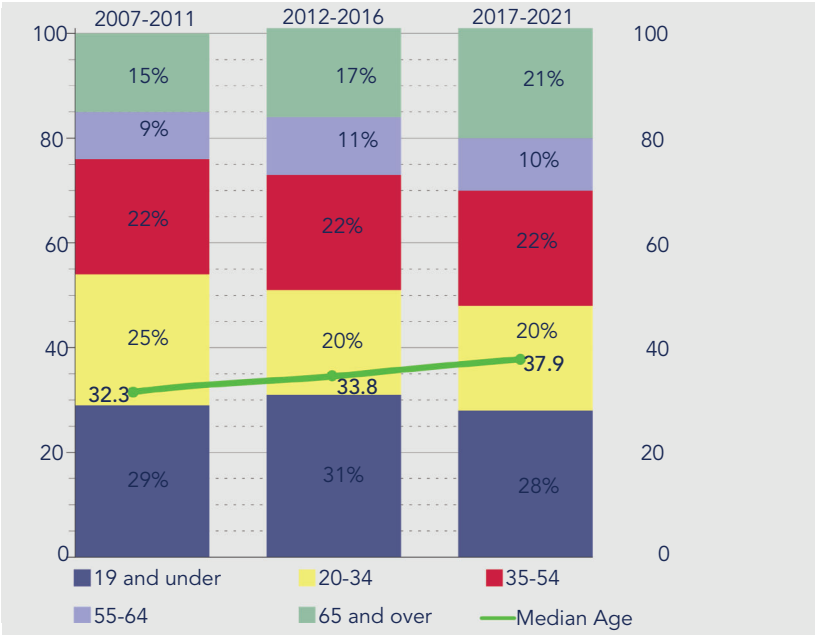

Figure 2-4. Trend in Age Over the Decade. Source: American Community Survey 2007-2011, 2012-2016, 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates

Race and Ethnicity Characteristics

Evaluating racial and ethnic characteristics is also important to establish an existing profile of a community. According to the 2020 Decennial Census, 49% of the population is solely white, which has decreased by 7.4% since 2010. Data also shows that the city is slowly becoming more diverse as the Hispanic or Latino population has experienced an increase since 2010.

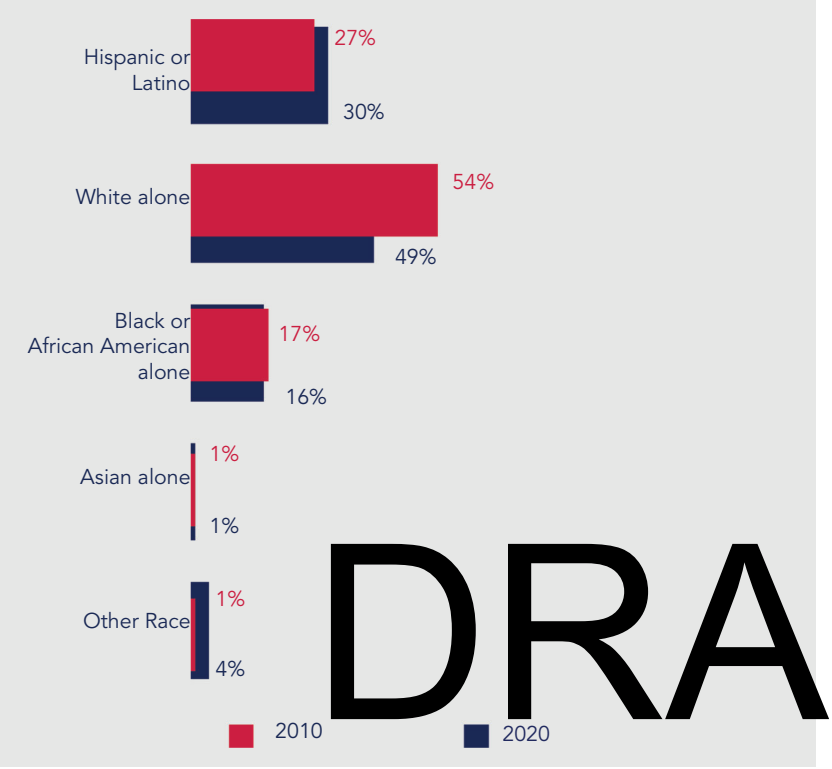

Figure 2-5. Race and Ethnity Comparison for Athens Area. Source: 2010 and 2020 Decennial Census

Educational Attainment

According to the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS), 33.4% of residents in Athens have a High School Diploma as their highest degree, while 20.4% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher.

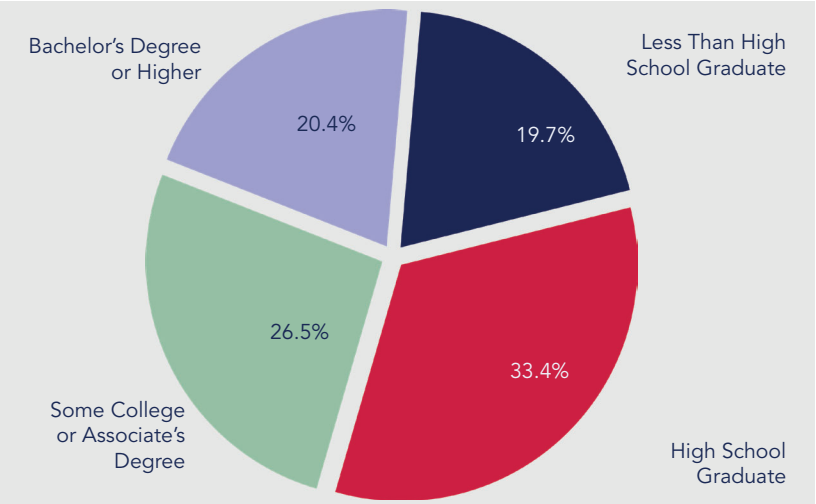

Figure 2-6. Educational Attainment. Source: American Community Survey 2017- 2021 5-Year Estimate

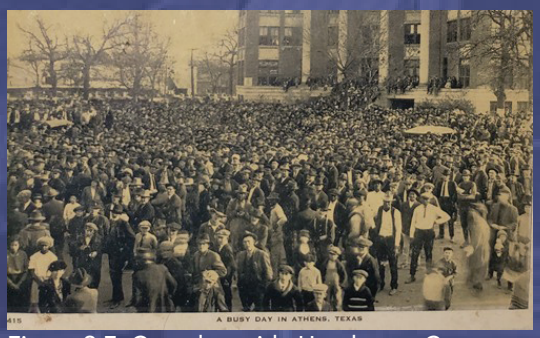

Figure 2-7. Crowd outside Henderson County Courthouse

Figure 2-8. South Athens Elementary students

Workforce Industry

Trinity Valley Community College, UT Health Athens, Argon Medical Devices, and Biomerics are some of Athens' major employers, which is why educational services, health care, and social assistance is the largest industry in both Athens and Henderson County. The city should continue capitalizing on these industries by attracting the workforce and providing amenities for existing and potential residents, such as parks and community events. The Athens workforce should continue to be a focus for economic development. The constant upgrading of skills is critical to meet industry demand for changing technologies.

	Athens	Henderson County
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	4.00%	5.50%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	9.80%	7.60%
Construction	10.20%	11.00%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	24.70%	21.60%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	3.90%	4.40%
Information	0.70%	0.70%
Manufacturing	13.40%	9.20%
Other services, except public administration	4.10%	5.20%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	11.40%	9.30%
Public administration	3.20%	4.90%
Retail trade	8.60%	11.50%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	4.50%	5.90%
Wholesale trade	1.50%	3.10%

Table 2-2. Workforce. Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates

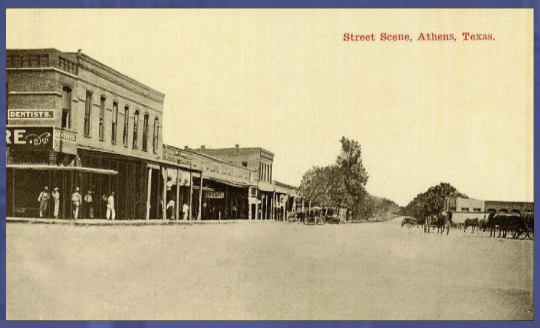

Figure 2-9. Athens street scene, circa 1908

Household Characteristics

Household characteristics are an essential element of a comprehensive plan since they can indicate what the future housing mix may look like. According to the American Community Survey, the average household size in Athens increased from 2.52 persons to 2.57 between 2011 and 2021. While the ACS indicates an 84.9% occupancy rate between 2017-2021, the 2020 Census provides a more accurate representation of the current occupancy rates at 90.4%. This is also true for the total number of housing units within the City of Athens where the 2020 Census indicates there were 5,302 units.

Year	2007-2011*	2012-2016*	2017-2021*	2020**
Total Housing Units	5,157	5,018	5,039	5,302
Percentage Occupied	88.7%	85.0%	84.9%	90.4%
Percentage Vacant	11.3%	15.0%	15.1%	9.6%
Average Household Size	2.52	2.62	2.57	-
Median Household Income	$36,284	$40,505	$45,625	-
Median Home Value	$89,900	$95,200	$109,500	-

"-" Indicate data not released by the U.S. Census Bureau at the time of writing this report.
** American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates: Tables DP02, DP03, and DP04*

Table 2-3. Household Characteristics. Source: American Community Survey 5 - Year Estimates and Decennial Census

According to the 2021 ACS, the median household income is $45,625, with the largest distribution of income being in the $50,000 to $74,000 income bracket. This is a 25.7% increase from 2011, with the median household income being $32,284.

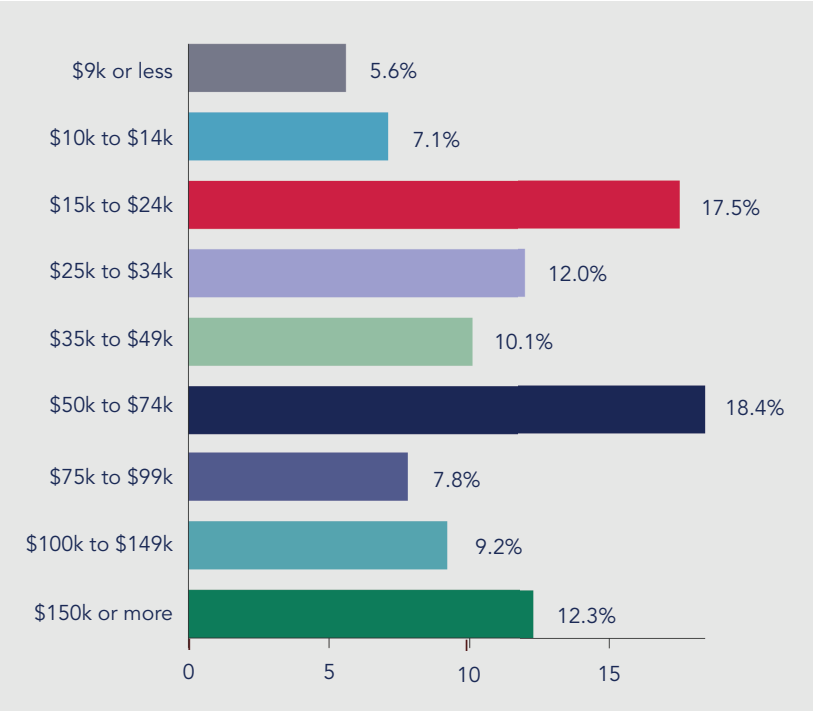

Figure 2-10. Household Income. Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates: Table DP02

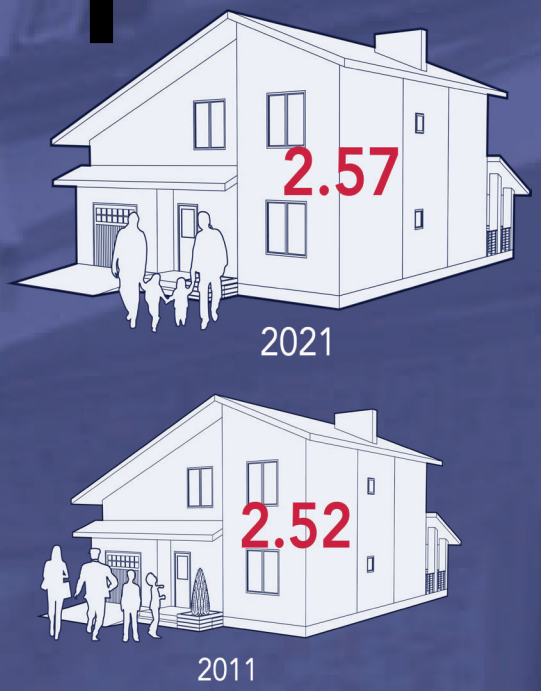

Figure 2-11. Average household size in 2011 and 2021

According to the 2021 ACS, the median home value was $109,500, a 21.8% increase compared to 2011, with the median home value being $89,000. Most units in Athens are valued at less than $99,000.

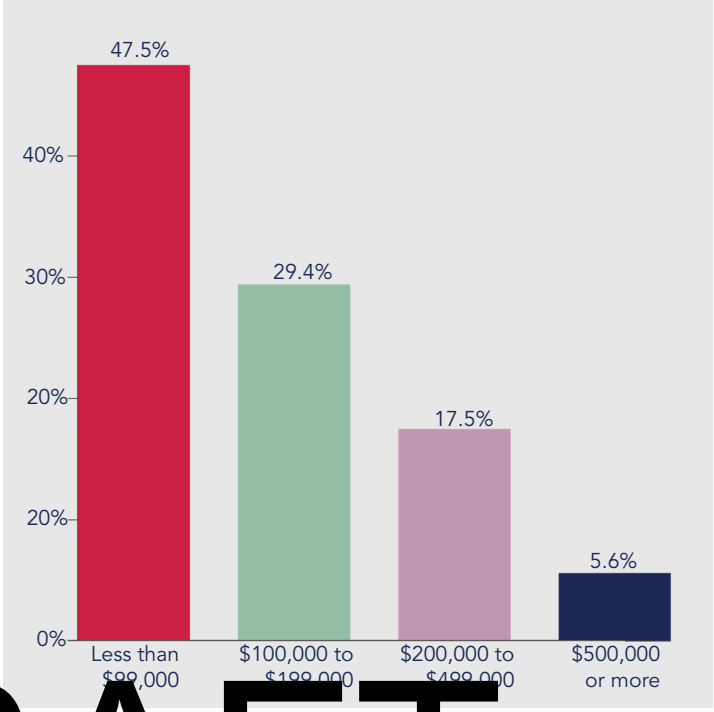

Figure 2-12. Housing Value. Source: American Community Survey 2017- 2021 5-Year Estimates: Table DP02

Knowing the current housing types in Athens is important to determine what housing types will be needed as the city plans for growth. According to the 2021 ACS, 65.40% of housing units in Athens are single-family homes, with apartments being the second largest housing type at 25.90%.

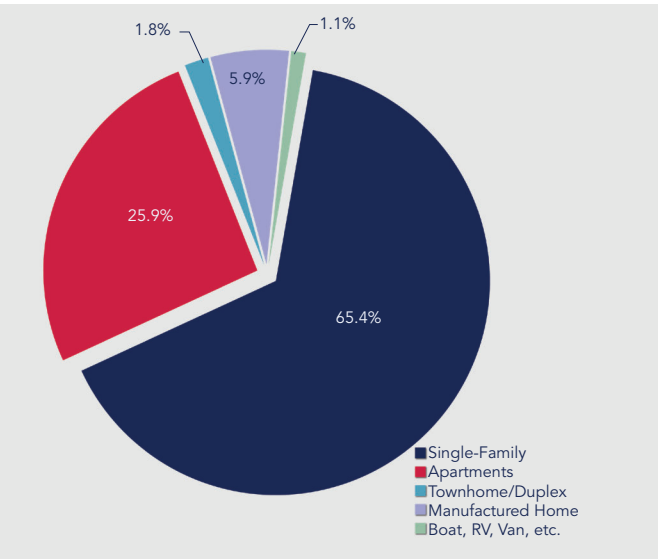

Figure 2-13. Housing Type. Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates: Table DP02

According to the 2021 ACS, 43.1% of units in Athens were built between 1970 and 1999, while only 22.7% were built after 2000. Therefore, most housing units in Athens are over 20 years old. The of Athens should consider the age of its housing stock and any potential for reinvestment programs to aid in attracting new residents to this area.

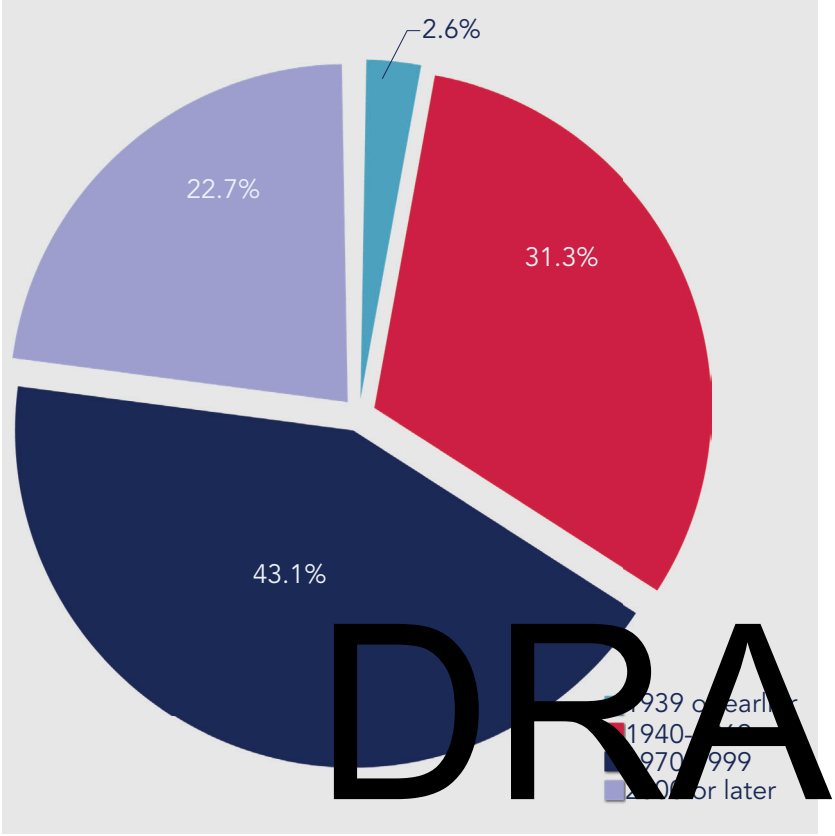

Figure 2-14. Housing Age. Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates: Table DP02

Figure 2-15. Athens Baptist Church, circa 1915

2-3 Greater Athens Area

In order to understand the future growth for the City of Athens, it's important to analyze the demographics of the area beyond the city limit boundary. While the previous subsections provided an analysis of the existing demographics, the following analysis considers the greater Athens area by utilizing census block groups. Census block group boundaries do not follow political boundaries such as city limits and ETJ so the data below includes areas outside Athens' jurisdiction. However it's important to consider as the residents in these surrounding areas frequent Athens for employment, shopping, and entertainment.

Population

The total population of all census block groups that cross Athens ETJ is 24,507 people. This is double the 12,857 population that resides within Athens' city limits. This is a considerable increase since these people are likely shopping and visiting Athens on a regular basis. For areas located northeast of Athens, residents may also be frequenting Tyler more regularly for additional services and entertainment that Athens may not offer. The city should focus on how to provide these additional services and amenities to attract other people to Athens.

Race and Ethnicity Characteristics

When comparing the greater Athens area to the city limits, there is a higher distribution of the white population (62%) than in the city limits (49%). The distribution of Hispanic and Black populations is higher within the city of Athens with 30% and 16%, respectively.

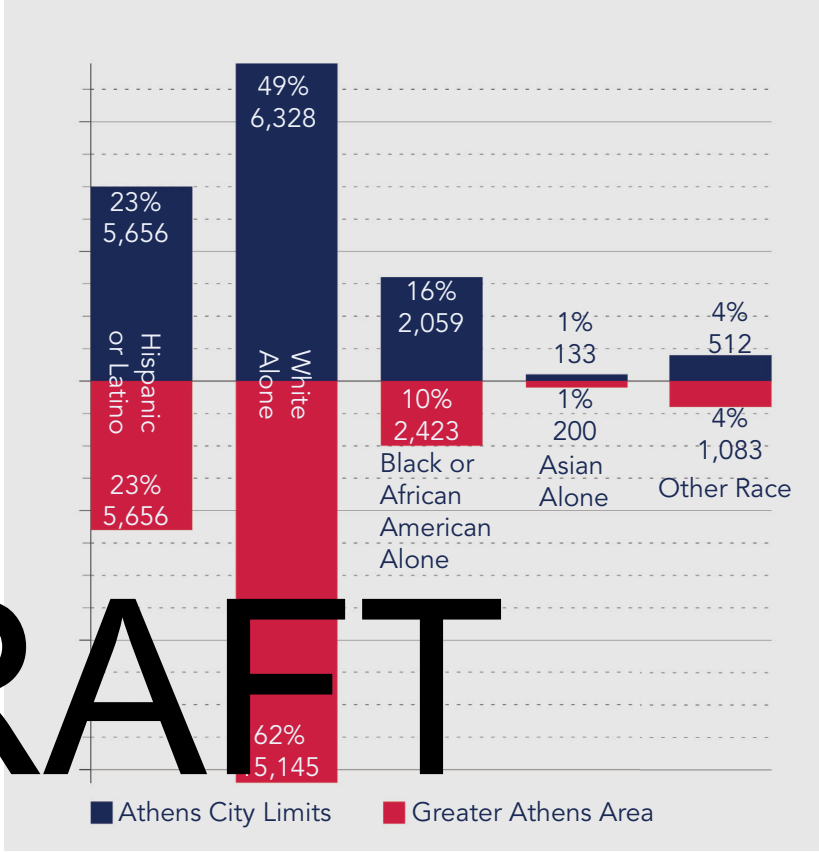

Figure 2-16. Race and Ethnicity Comparison. Source: 2020 Decennial Census

Housing Units and Occupancy Rates

According to the 2020 Decennial Census, the greater Athens area has a total of 10,611 housing units, compared to the 5,302 located within the city limits. The percentage of occupied units in the greater Athens area is 87.6% compared to 90.4% within the city limits.

	Athens City Limits	Greater Athens Area
Total Housing Units	5,302	10,611
Percentage Occupied	90.4%	87.6%
Percentage Vacant	9.6%	12.4%

Table 2-4. Housing Units and Occupancy Rates. Source: 2020 Decennial Census


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3. DEVELOPING THE PLAN

3-1 Introduction

The robust public engagement process was one of the most critical aspects of the Athens TOMORROW comprehensive plan. Public engagement efforts were conducted by a different consultant, which began in 2019 and was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Engagement efforts concluded in late 2020. During the public engagement process, a diverse range of stakeholders were consulted, including various citizen committees, focus groups, and elected officials. The outreach process for this plan included a variety of methods utilizing both external and internal sources as well as on-site and online engagement opportunities. External engagement methods included charrettes, online surveys, focus groups, social media, advertisements, and public open houses.

The public participation process aimed to build consensus and commitment between elected and appointed officials, city staff, and residents, informing the policy decisions written in this document.

3-2 Public Engagement

The various groups involved in the plan update included the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC), Plan Focus Groups, city staff, and City Council. Each group served a specific role in the plan update to ultimately guide the policies and recommendations in this document.

Figure 3-1. Plan Focus Group Meeting

Figure 3-2. Focus Group Meeting

Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC)

The CPAC was comprised of community leaders who met regularly throughout the process to discuss community feedback, policy decisions, and recommendations presented by the Plan Focus Group. This Committee was the driving group for the policy decisions in this plan.

Plan Focus Groups

Due to the broad nature of the comprehensive plan, seven focus groups were established to provide more targeted feedback on the specific policies and actions developed for the plan. The focus groups were each led by a different city staff member who served as the subject matter expert for the different topics. The focus groups mirrored the overarching policy themes of Athens TOMORROW: Downtown, Infrastructure, Land Use, Public Safety, Quality of Life, Unity/Partnership, and Education/Employment.

Athens City Council

As Athens' ultimate policy decision-makers, City Council was engaged at key intervals during the planning process to ensure that the plan aligned with the City Council's strategic vision for the community.

City Staff

City staff, being key implementers of the recommendations for the

comprehensive plan and those most familiar with the city's day-to-day operations, provided context for both existing conditions and recommended actions generated during the planning process.

3-3 Vision and Goals

The process of creating the vision and goals in this document kicked off with the creation of the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC). The CPAC began meeting in October 2019 to discuss the overall themes of the plan which resulted in creating a project brand to generate momentum for the project. Athens TOMORROW was chosen as the project brand and was utilized to easily identify and reference the comprehensive plan update.

Stakeholder Interviews

Approximately 35 stakeholder interviews were conducted at the beginning of the process to solicit input on the comprehensive plan update. The interviews consisted of individual interviews and small group interviews with community leaders and various groups throughout the city. City staff coordinated the interview process and selected a wide range of participants representative of the community fabric.

Vision Themes

The input gathered during the stakeholder interviews and CPAC discussions culminated into the following overarching themes.

The vision themes are listed below:

1. Community Character
2. Land Use
3. Mobility
4. Economic Development
5. Environmental
6. City Government
7. Community Health
8. Future Downtown
9. Public Safety
10. Partnership

Public Meeting / Workshop #1

The first public meeting took place on December 10, 2019. This meeting was targeted to encourage citizens to engage in the plan and give direct input on the plan's goals and themes.

Public Meeting / Workshop #2

Due to the pandemic, a second public meeting/workshop was held on September 10, 2020. City staff focused on the current and short-term real estate market in Athens and reviewing growth and development scenario options city-wide and downtown. After the presentation, the audience answered questions about topics related to each scenario. The goal was to review the com-

Figure 3-3. Public Meeting #1 Presentation

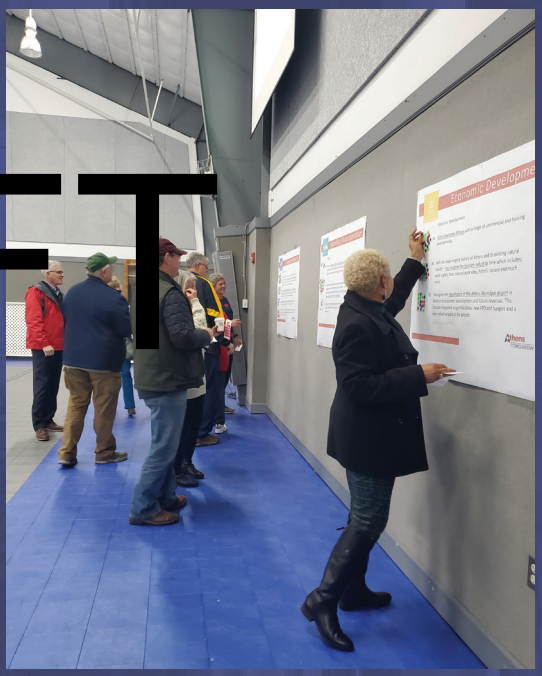

Figure 3-4. Athens resodemts providing input during Public Meeting #1

Figure 3-5. Community Meeting #2

Figure 3-6. Athens residents providing input during Public Meeting #2

munity's input, target their desires toward a preferred scenario, and eventually, future land use plans and related plan elements.

The public meeting concluded with a question-and-answer session regarding development potential in downtown, parking in downtown, the future tourism industry in Athens, employment options, renovated Cain Center, diversity of housing needed for Athens, and growth around the airport. The dialogue of this session translated into further defining the goals and policies of this plan.

Comprehensive Plan Goals

Consistent with the visioning themes, a set of overarching goals were developed representative of the public input collected during the 2019 and 2020 public engagement process. The implementation strategy listed at the end of this document provides specific recommendations that will implement the following goals.

- **Community Character** – Preserve the character of the downtown and existing single family residential neighborhoods by reinvesting in these areas and ensuring high-quality redevelopment.
- **Land Use** – Ensure balanced growth and development compatible with the surrounding community.
- **Mobility** – Strengthen transportation connections and increase choices between ways to travel for all users.
- **Economic Development** – Expand and diversify target industries through partnerships and strategic recruitment.
- **Environmental** - Enhance and preserve natural amenities for an improved quality of life for Athens' residents.
- **City Government** – Continue to be transparent with city policy decisions and encourage public participation to best move forward and manage Athens together.
- **Community Health** - Develop a more extensive system of parks, trails, and open spaces for the future.
- **Public Safety** – Provide excellent public services to promote the health, welfare, and safety of Athens.
- **Partnership** - Build a well-connected and fully prepared community through partnerships and compromise.

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4. FUTURE LAND USE

4-1 Introduction

Land use is how a property is used, whether residential, operating a business, or running a factory. The combination and location of different land uses relative to each other make a community unique. Land use determines where restaurants, jobs, and housing are located, which can impact property value. Property value determines how much the city can collect in tax revenue and affects the city's ability to provide services, such as fire and police protection. Thus, land use can have decades-long impacts on a city if not planned appropriately. The city's role in land use is to influence and guide the location and compatibility of development to protect the health, safety, and welfare of its citizens.

The main component of this section is the Future Land Use Map, which establishes guidance on future land uses within the city limits and extraterritorial jurisdiction. It is a high-level document that sets the vision for development in Athens and is not regulatory. However, state law requires that a city adopt a comprehensive plan to require zoning. Therefore, the city's zoning ordinance and zoning map are the legal framework to implement the Future Land Use Map via zoning districts and zoning regulations for each allowed use. While future land use and zoning are similar, they are not the same. Future land use maps sets guidance on preferred land uses, and zoning establishes the legal use of a parcel of land.

This section aims to determine potential land uses in Athens and meet the city's goals for development and redevelopment.

4-2 Existing Land Use Analysis

The existing land uses for Athens and its extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) were analyzed to understand the distribution of land uses and to identify growth and redevelopment opportunities. Each parcel within the city limits and ETJ was assigned a land use based on the current usage at the time of writing this plan. A combination of satellite imagery and field verification via street photos was utilized to determine the property's current use. Other public information, such as current ownership as indicated in the County Appraisal District, was also used to determine the existing land use.

It is essential to examine the existing condition of development within the city limits and ETJ to establish whether the current land use pattern is appropriate for the area and consistent with the city's goals. Figure 4-1 shows the percentage of existing land uses in Athens. It is important to note that the percentages in the bar graph are based on acreage and not the number of parcels.

As seen in Figure 4-1, a combined 69% of the land is being used for agricultural purposes or is undeveloped. Much of this land is located along the city limit lines and outside most of the downtown core. While 50.8% of the land is currently being used for agricultural purposes, there is the potential for these properties to be sold and developed

in the future. Additional development within the city limits is preferable and presents an opportunity for increased city tax revenues.

The third largest existing land use in Athens is classified as single-family residential, which comprises 16.4% of the acreage in Athens. Most single-family parcels are located within the city, specifically inside the TX-175/7/19 loop. As seen on the map, a substantial amount of undeveloped and agricultural land surrounds single-family parcels. The map also shows many small, undeveloped lots around Lake Athens. These undeveloped and agricultural parcels create the potential for new single-family residential development to increase the availability and of single-family homes in Athens.

Based on the analysis, 6.8% of the land in Athens is used for public and institutional purposes. Much of this land use is located within the city core and is used for parks, roadways, lakes, schools, city and county facilities, and churches.

Commercial and office consists of 3.6% of the land in Athens. The map shows that most of the land used for commercial and office purposes is in the downtown area and along major roadways. Commercial activity includes a wide variety of businesses such as retail shops, restaurants, grocery stores, and personal services. Maintaining strong commercial areas is important to the city as these areas provide employment and promote a healthy and vibrant local economy. Commercial areas also allow for additional sales tax opportunities, which raises revenues for the city.

The percentage of land used as industrial is 2.3%. This percentage is important for the city to maintain and increase as industrial land uses provide jobs, such as manufacturing, distribution, and research and development. The city should continue to target employers in these industries to relocate to Athens. Higher employment opportunities will entice residents to stay in Athens and attract talent from other areas, encouraging growth and benefitting the local economy.

Multi-family consists 0.4% of the land distribution in Athens. This percentage should be increased with the amount of undeveloped/agricultural land within the city. As the city targets growth, additional housing options are needed to accommodate new and existing residents. Additional housing options, such as multi-family, accommodate people at different stages in their life. This encourages residents to age in place, which is key for the longevity of the city.

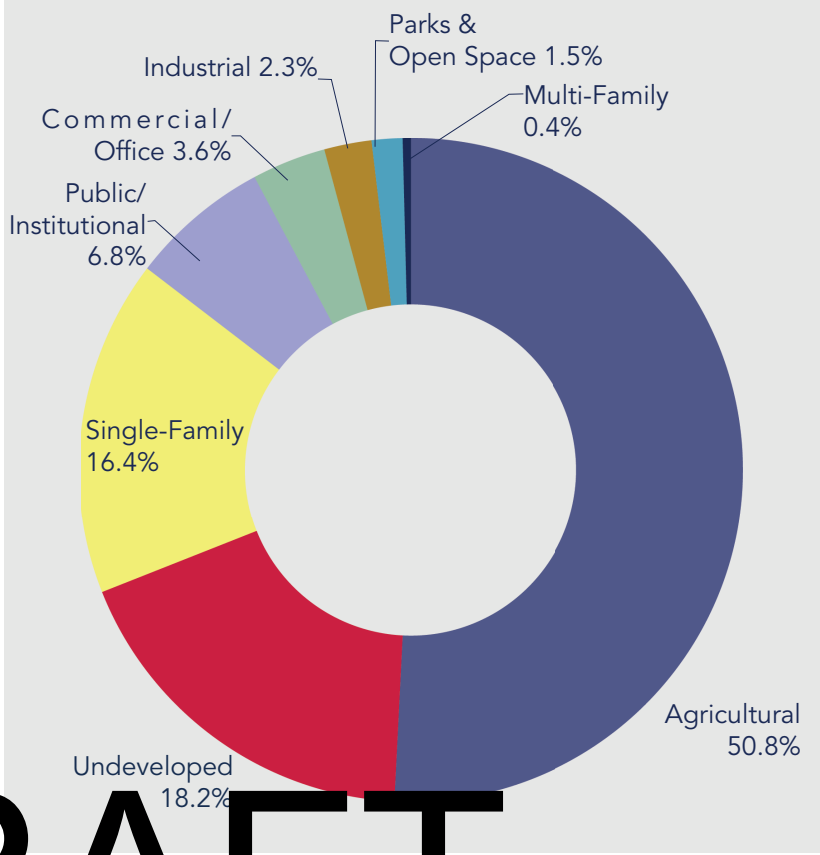


Figure 4-2: Land Uses

4-3 Recommended Growth Districts

As the county seat of Henderson County, Athens has a unique position that draws people from the surrounding areas to do business within the city limits. Excellent highway infrastructure and proximity to other interstate highways provide opportunities to attract regional distribution centers. This offers the City of Athens an opportunity to strategically target growth within its city limits and ETJ.

Based on the existing land use analysis, the following districts were identified as recommended growth areas. Each growth area describes desired land uses, infrastructure improvements, and services that would achieve the vision of future development for each area. The areas were selected based on:

- Location and physical relationships
- Size and physical features
- Existing adjacent land uses and conditions
- Access to potential and adjacent thoroughfares
- Economic factors and opportunity

These districts are depicted on the Future Land Use Map and will be implemented as overlay districts. The city's zoning ordinance will need to be revised to allow these overlay districts.

Airport District

Existing Conditions

The Athens Municipal Airport is located along TX-19N/TX-7 Loop East in the southern part of Athens. Existing land uses include commercial, residential, and medical office.

Vision

This area is envisioned to grow and provide support services to the airport. A future expansion to the airport is currently being considered by the Athens City Council in coordination with the Athens Economic Development Corporation. Due to the proximity to UT Health Athens, commercial uses such as hotels and medical offices are appropriate in this area. The TX-19/TX-7 Loop provides easy access for development of other commercial services such as large-scale retail that would draw people to shop in this area. The undeveloped land east of the airport could accommodate additional industrial uses because of the access to the highway and connectivity to Tyler. However, industrial facilities should be prioritized within the Industrial District.

Figure 4-2. Planes parked at Athens Municipal Airport

Figure 4-3. Athens Airport Sign

Figure 4-4. Downtown Athens Buildings

Figure 4-5. Downtown Athens Streetscape

Figure 4-6. Inspirational image of Downtown McKinney, Texas

Figure 4-7. Inspirational image of Downtown Granbury, Texas

Downtown District

Existing Conditions

Downtown Athens is located at the heart of the city, with all major roadways leading to downtown. As the county seat for Henderson County, the Henderson County Courthouse is located in the middle of downtown, encompassing an entire block and is surrounded by landscaped open space. Additional county services are located in adjacent buildings. Other land uses found in downtown include institutional, commercial, office, and open space. Smaller tenants occupy existing buildings and include banks, offices, restaurants, and retail shops.

Vision

As the primary pedestrian-friendly area in Athens, the character of this area should be maintained and existing facilities should be enhanced as opportunities arise. The city should seek private-public partnerships that would result in infrastructure improvements such as additional parking, traffic calming measures for pedestrians, and bike lanes. County parking is also available on evenings and weekends to supplement existing on-street parking. Opportunity for additional parking is also available a block from the square. To promote pedestrian safety, pavers could be added at intersections to serve as an aesthetic enhancement and provide traffic calming measures. Bike lanes and other infrastructure could also be improved to encourage connectivity to surrounding areas. Additionally, the city could emphasize city-sponsored events to attract patrons and visitors to downtown.

Future land uses should include urban residential, retail, office, mixed-use, entertainment, and tourism related uses. The Athens Economic Development Corporation (EDC) should play a role in attracting and potentially incentivizing businesses such as additional restaurants and retail shops downtown. The additional availability of restaurant options may appeal residents to visit downtown after business hours for dinner, shopping or an evening stroll. Small improvements such as outdoor seating, lighting for ambiance, and additional public art may be installed along the square to activate downtown. The city should facilitate and streamline review processes to allow the development of downtown as much as possible.

Industrial District

Existing Conditions

This district is located in northeast Athens within the US 175 loop. Existing industrial uses are located along Flat Creek Road, which include Argon Medical Devices, Dallas Manufacturing, and Redi River Brick. Additional industrial uses on Enterprise Street include major employers such as Schneider Electric and Biomerics. Supporting commercial services such as hotels and a car dealership are located along East Tyler Street.

Figure 4-8. Athens Industrial Park

Vision

This area is envisioned as the city's primary industrial district and should continue to include uses such as manufacturers, warehouse distribution facilities, and technology research and development. Additional commercial, retail, and office uses should be located along East Tyler Street to serve the surrounding area.

The Athens EDC is also actively incentivizing industrial development to attract corporations and generate employment opportunities. With Trinity Valley Community College located within the city, corporations could utilize recent graduates as a talent pipeline to fill employment needs. The proximity to highway infrastructure and availability of land all provide excellent opportunities for industrial development in this district.

Figure 4-9. Medical Office along South Palestine Street

Figure 4-10. UT Health Athens

Medical District

Existing Conditions

This area consists of a mix of commercial, office, single-family, institutional, and undeveloped uses. The main anchor of this area is UT Health Athens, a level 4, regional hospital serving the county. This medical center is an essential asset to Athens that serves an entire region for medical care, as well as bringing employees, patients, and visitors every day to Athens. In addition to the hospital, UT Health Athens also provides services in separate clinics around the area. One of the clinics is CHRISTUS Trinity Mother Frances Health System, which is expanding its emergency care center.

Vision

The area between UT Health Athens and the Athens Municipal Airport has immense development potential. Additional commercial services, such as restaurants, daycare facilities, and hotels, should be located in this area to serve the employees, patients, and their family members who are employed by and use these health centers. High-density and medium-density residential developments are needed to provide housing for those who work in the area. With the health center in this district, it would be beneficial to develop senior housing facilities s[illegible] easily access healthcare facilities. Currently, several businesses, such as Advanced Rehabilitation and Healthcare of Athens, are located in this area; however, developing more of these facilities along with senior living facilities would be beneficial. The Athens EDC should continue to serve as a resource to assist interested businesses looking to locate in this district.

4-4 Future Land Use Map

A Future Land Use Map (FLUM) is a graphic representation of the community's desired land uses based on policy decisions and community goals established in this Comprehensive Plan. It is one of the most important components of the plan because it will guide new development and redevelopment in Athens for the next 20-30 years.

Although the Future Land Use Map is not a regulatory document, development proposals should be considered and evaluated based on whether the development meets the goals and intent of the map and the overall comprehensive plan. The land uses on this map are meant to be broad in scope and not defined on a parcel-by-parcel basis. Each land use is intended to have a different character and is situated based on compatibility with adjacent land uses.

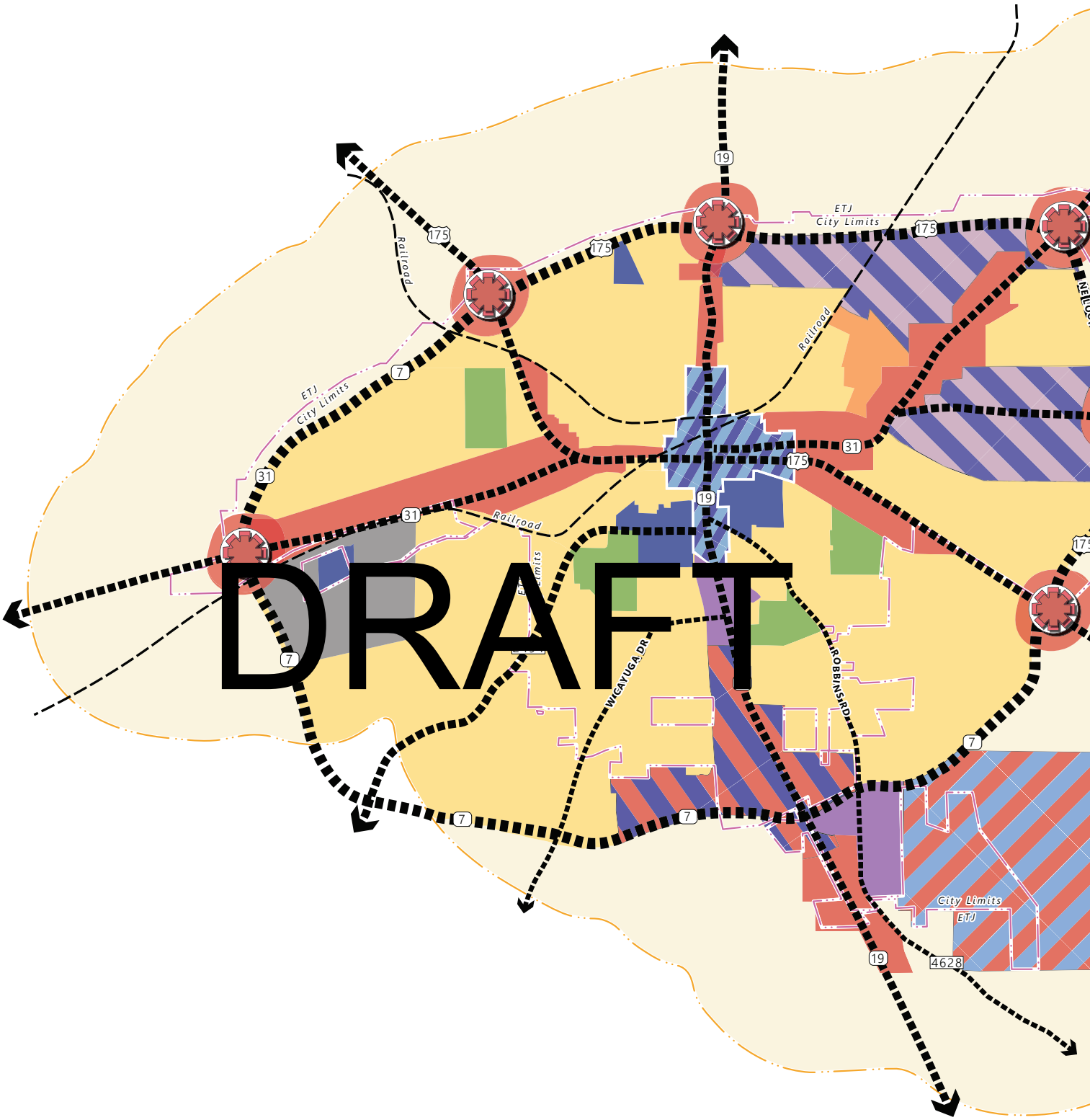
The implementation of the Future Land Use Map is accomplished with the enforcement of the city's zoning map, which prescribes the legal land use of a parcel of land based on city regulations. Each parcel of land within the city limits is regulated by a zoning district with site-specific development requirements based on the proposed use. Development requirements affect how the site and building are designed in order to complement adjacent land uses. Chapter 211 of the Texas Local Government Code states that zoning regulations must be adopted in accordance with a Comprehensive Plan. Therefore, a city's adopted zoning map should fully reflect the vision of the Future Land Use Map. Table 4-1, provides a side-by-side comparison of a future land use and zoning map.

What is the Difference Between a Future Land Use Map and Zoning Map?	
Future Land Use Map	Zoning Map
• Broad view of land use, not site specific	• Implements the Future Land Use Map
• Provides guidance for zoning decisions	• Regulatory documents adopted by ordinance
	• Site-specific land use allowances and regulations

Table 4-1 Difference between Future Land Use Map and Zoning Map

The Future Land Use Map is intended to be a living document and allow amendments to the map as the market changes. There may be instances where rezoning requests may be in direct conflict with the FLUM but may meet the overall intent of the plan. In those instances where an outstanding development is proposed and would benefit the City of Athens, a FLUM amendment may be considered prior to a zoning change. Staff should establish a formal process to evaluate these requests and consider how the applicant will address the following items. If it is determined that the development will enhance the quality of life for the citizens of Athens, then the FLUM may be amended in a concurrent process to a zoning change. The applicant should be responsible to provide supporting information on how their development impacts the criteria listed below.

- Significant market or development changes since the adoption of this plan
- Infrastructure availability near the site
- Impact to the surrounding area – whether positive or negative
- Compatibility with surrounding area in land use and operation
- Economic impact to the City of Athens
- Quality of development that is above and beyond what is required
- Overall impact to health, safety, and welfare



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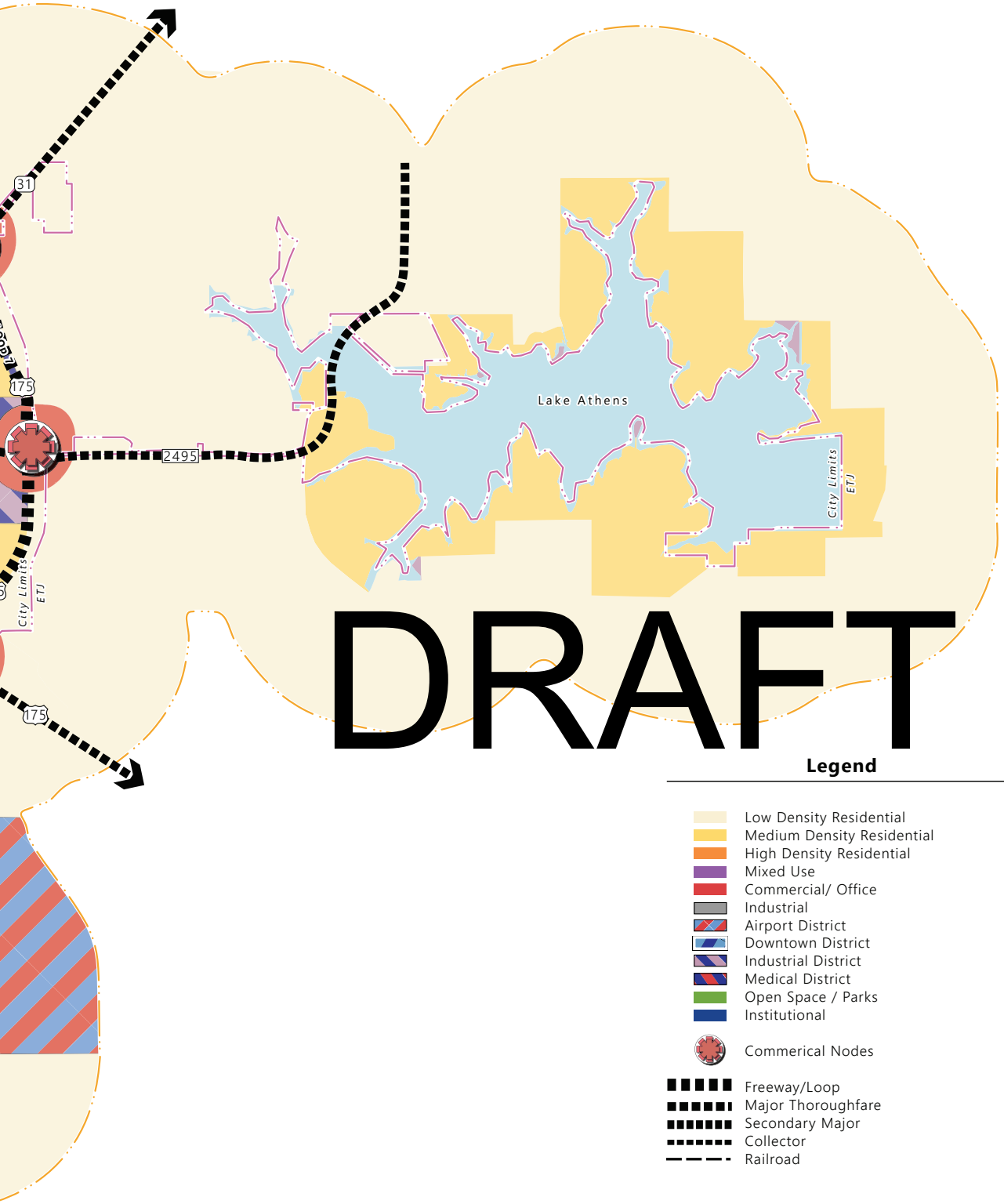
Pursuant to TX LGC-Ch. 213-Sec.213.005, a comprehensive plan shall not constitute zoning regulations, or establish zoning district boundaries.



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4-5 Land Use Descriptions

The land uses established on the FLUM considered the existing development patterns and future development opportunities. Roadway and pedestrian connectivity and utility availability were all examined to determine the best location for these land uses. The land use descriptions below provide additional context and intent for the character of each land use shown on the Future Land Use Map.

Low Density Residential

This land use category consists of residential estates and ranches that are rural in character and may include agricultural uses such as livestock, barns, and other similar accessory uses. These areas are expected to remain agricultural and are primarily located in the city's extraterritorial jurisdiction. Lot sizes would consist of 15,000 square feet or greater. Development characteristics may include large setbacks, substantial open spaces between lots, and either curb and gutter or open ditch streets. Depending on the size and location, the properties may utilize well and septic utilities. These areas are intended to stay rural in character.

Medium Density Residential

This land use category consists of detached single family residential lots that range between 5,000 and 15,000 square feet. Development characteristics would include curb and gutter streets, connection to public utility systems, recreation amenities, and other facilities to serve the neighborhood. Other supporting land uses such as daycares, churches, schools, and neighborhood commercial may be appropriate if located along arterial roads. Existing high-density residential housing products such as duplexes and attached-single family are captured in this land use category. Future high-density residential may also be appropriate if it consists of housing products that are similar in character to the surrounding area. Future nonresidential and high-density residential uses located adjacent to residential should not negatively impact the surrounding area.

High Density Residential

This land use category applies to single-family residential lots under 5,000 square feet and other housing types such as attached and detached townhomes, duplexes, and multi-family. This land use category is appropriate adjacent to nonresidential land uses to act as a buffer between medium-density residential and other nonresidential uses. In the future, high-density residential could be appropriate adjacent to downtown areas, near the community college, and in the medical district.

Mixed Use

The mixed-use land use category includes a mix of residential, low-intensity commercial, office, and retail uses. This category applies to unique areas in Athens such as downtown and adjacent blocks. High-density residential would also be appropriate in this category if redevelopment or infill development occurs.

Figure 4-11. Rural single-family home in Athens

Figure 4-12. Cream Level Road Single-family in Athens

Figure 4-13. Example of multi-family in Conroe, Texas

Figure 4-14. Townhomes appropriate in High Density Residential Land Use Cataegory

Figure 4-15. Mixed Use Homes

Figure 4-16. East Tyler Street Commercial Development

Figure 4-17. Future Manvel Town Center Commercial Development

Figure 4-18. Henderson County Courthouse

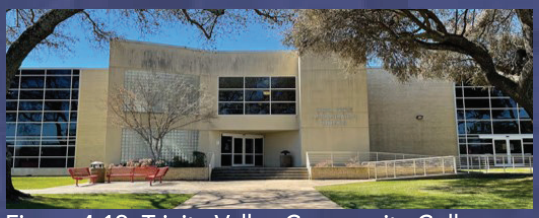

Figure 4-19. Trinity Valley Community College

Figure 4-20. Open space at Cain Park

Commercial / Office

This land use category applies to auto-dominant commercial, office, retail, and other services. Large commercial centers should be located at the intersection of major highways, as indicated by the commercial node symbol on the Future Land Use Map. Small-scale commercial development may be located along the inner-city corridors along arterials and major collector streets. The development pattern would typically include buildings setback on the property with surface parking fronting the property. Inter access should be provided between commercial development sites to promote internal circulation within the development. Shared parking should be utilized between compatible uses when appropriate. However, other site configurations can be evaluated during the review process. High-density residential would also be appropriate and may be located adjacent to either small- or large-scale commercial development. High-density residential should be accessed via side streets and not via major roadways.

Institutional

This land use category includes major city and county government facilities such as Athens City Hall, Henderson County Courthouse, Henderson County annex, wastewater treatment plants, and other infrastructure facilities. This category also includes education facilities such as Trinity Valley Community College and Athens ISD facilities. Smaller facilities such as lift stations or elementary schools embedded within a neighborhood are classified in the surrounding land use.

Parks and Open Space

This land use category applies to existing city parks and large open spaces such as the Athens County Club and East Texas Arboretum. Areas identified as Parks and Open Space are expected to remain as such. Although the city does not currently have an adopted parks and open space master plan, it is recommended that when the plan is drafted and adopted, any future parks identified in the plan should be classified as parks and open space land use. Smaller pocket parks specific to the neighborhood can be classified with the surrounding land use.

Industrial

This land use category applies to uses that include manufacturing, distribution, and research and development. These uses may negatively impact surrounding land uses, so additional mitigation strategies such as screening, buffering, and site design should be considered.


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5. MOBILITY

5-1 Introduction

Figure 5-1. Highway signs

Mobility is essential as it influences the accessibility, connectedness, character, economy, and marketability of a city. It focuses on roadways and various ways to move around throughout the city, including cars, buses, walking, and biking through both public and private transportation. A well-functioning transportation system can support the economic vitality of a city and the surrounding areas and facilitate its regional competitiveness, as well as allowing for easy and efficient movement of people throughout the city. Part of a city's livability is determined by how well-integrated land use policies are with transportation planning efforts. For example, the street hierarchy can dictate the use of adjacent land; conversely, the type of land use can determine the size of the roadways. This chapter intends to provide an understanding of the existing street network and provide general guidance on the functional classification system. This chapter also includes the Master Thoroughfare Plan and reflects the recommendations from the 1999 Master Thoroughfare Plan in an updated map.

5-2 Existing Transportation Network

Athens has an established transportation network which allows for the efficient movement of vehicles and goods through the city's approximately 29 square miles. Like many cities in Texas, Athens is an auto-oriented environment with regional highways radiating outward from downtown, including US Highway 175, State Highway 31, and State Highway 19. Loop 7 is built around the City of Athens, which serves as a bypass for the state highways, and allows easy access to various parts of the city. These regional highways have accommodated Athens's vehicular traffic volumes and will facilitate future development.

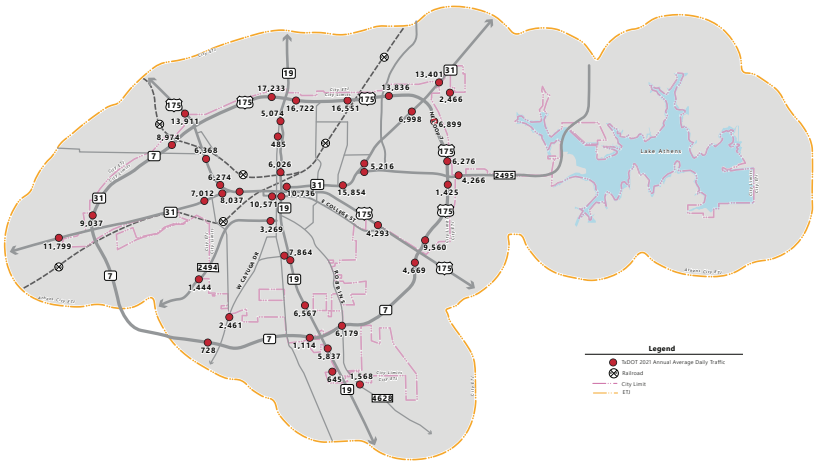


Figure 5-2. 2021 Athens annual average Daily traffic.

Regional Network

U.S. Highway 175

U.S. Highway 175 (US 175) is the most traveled corridor in Athens and serves as a vital transportation route to the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area (DFW). This corridor is a major gateway into Athens and provides a first impression to visitors entering Athens from DFW. US 175 bisects Athens in a southeast-northwest direction and is built as a four-lane roadway with a middle turn lane. The traffic on US 175 can bypass downtown by utilizing the loop or access downtown via Business 175. According to the Texas Department of Transportation's Statewide Traffic Analysis and Reporting System (STARS II) Figure 5-2, the annual average daily traffic in 2021 was 13,911 vehicles near County Road 3925, compared to 6,903 vehicles on State Highway 19 near County Road 3907.

Figure 5-3. Highway signs


Figure 5-4. Railroad crossing

State Highway 31

State Highway 31 (SH 31) begins in Waco and runs northeast, connecting Corsicana, Athens, Tyler, Kilgore, and Longview. SH 31 is built as a four-lane roadway with a middle turn lane for most of its length through Athens. SH 31 also leads directly into downtown and carries most traffic between Athens and Tyler. In 2021, this corridor carried an annual average daily traffic of 15,697 vehicles, captured just north of FM 2495. This level of traffic is higher than US 175, likely due to multiple local trips and those commuting to Tyler daily. The increased traffic on this corridor likely explains why more commercial development is locating on East Tyler Street versus West Corsicana Street.

State Highway 19

State Highway 19 (SH 19) is the primary north-south connection in Athens. SH 19 begins outside the north loop as a two-lane roadway with a full shoulder and widens to four lanes with a middle turn lane after North Prairieville Street. SH 19 continues as four lanes past the south loop. In 2021, this corridor carried an annual average daily traffic between approximately 6,500 and 6,900 vehicles, captured near Rosedale Drive in the south and near County Road 3907, respectively. As many as 10,571 vehicles were captured near East College Street, likely due to the multiple trips of locals in the area.


Figure 5-5. Street view in Downtown Athens

Local Network

The city's local street network design varies throughout the city. Areas in and around downtown developed as a grid system, which was common during the earlier development of the city. Newer subdivision development consists of curvilinear streets, cul-de-sacs, and loop roads that bring traffic to collector roads and higher classification roadways.

Additional Modes of Transportation

While Athens is primarily auto-oriented, it is also essential to plan for other modes of transportation, such as walking, biking, and public transit. Athens' physical size provides a great framework to travel by walking or biking to destinations across the city. However, the cur-

Figure 5-6. GOBUS public transit system operates in Athens

Figure 5-7. Example of buffered bike lane

rent pedestrian sidewalk network is fragmented and bicycle facilities are limited to sharing existing sidewalks with pedestrians or sharing roadways with motorists. Additional details on how to capitalize on bicycle and pedestrian facilities is provided in Section 6. Public transit is available via "GOBUS", which is a rural demand response public transit system in East Texas funded and operated by the East Texas Council of Governments (ETCOG). GOBUS provides local services within the East Texas region as well as trips to Tyler from Athens.

5-3 Mobility Principles

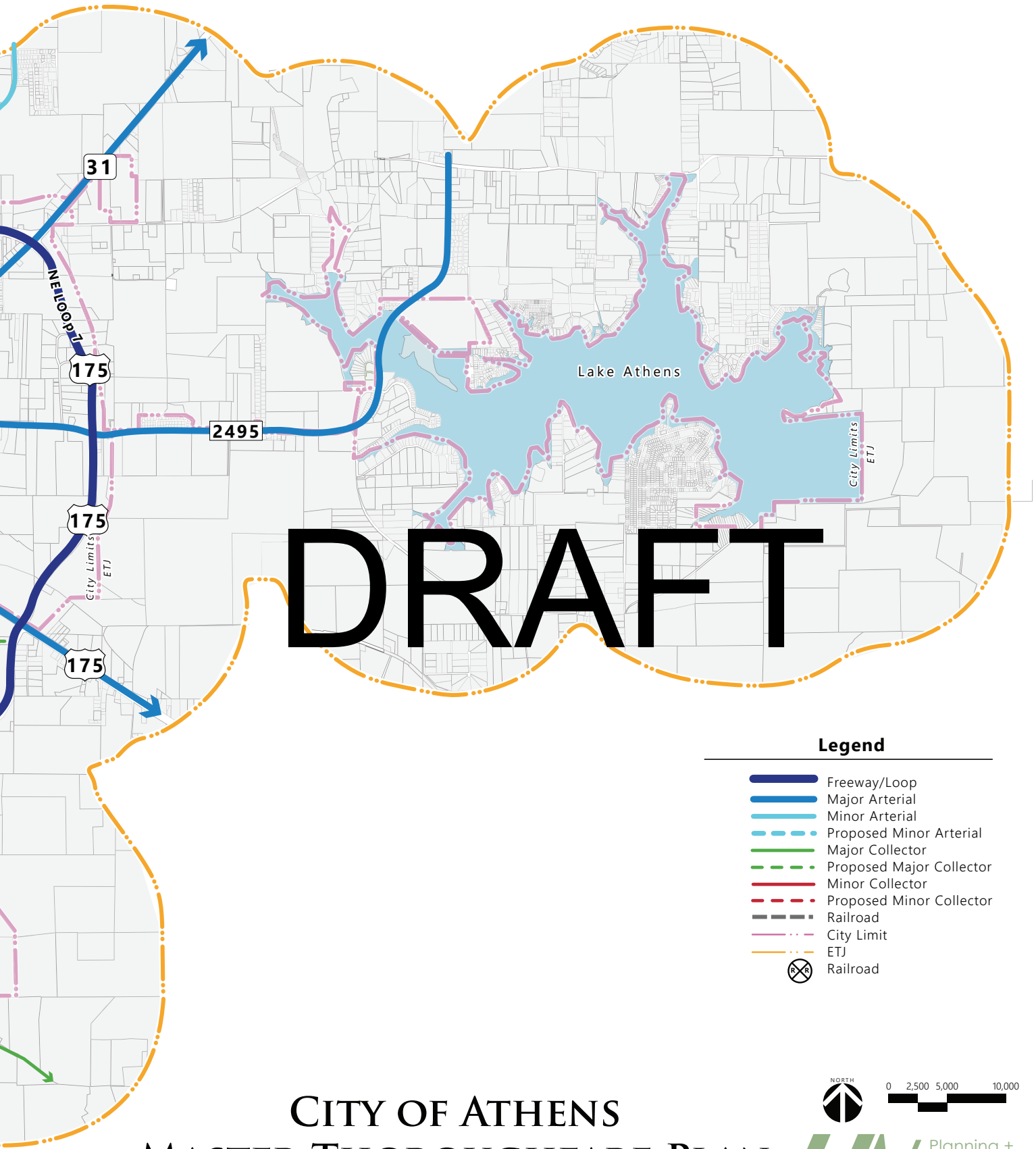
The following principles provide local officials and city staff guidance as they evaluate development proposals and improve the transportation network in Athens:

- Provide pedestrian and bike facilities in appropriate road ways such as minor arterials and below, connecting destina tions in Athens.
- Consider traffic calming measures in the downtown area.
- Future development should connect to existing stub streets as much as possible to promote connectivity.
- New curb cuts along major roadways should be minimized to improve traffic movement.
- Shared access should be provided to utilize existing drive ways and promote connectivity in commercial areas.
- Intersection and commercial driveway spacing should be based on the functional classification.
- Encourage landscaping along roadways to improve beautification across the city.

5-4 Master Thoroughfare Plan

The following Master Thoroughfare Plan reflects an updated graphic of the 1999 Thoroughfare Plan. As described in the introduction, it is strongly recommended that a detailed study be prepared to examine all existing roadways and determine future connectivity in Athens.

This map was recreated as part of the Comprehensive Plan update and reflects the 1999 Master Thoroughfare Plan recommendations. The functional roadway classifications were revised from major/secondary thoroughfares to major/minor arterials.



City of Athens
Master Thoroughfare Plan

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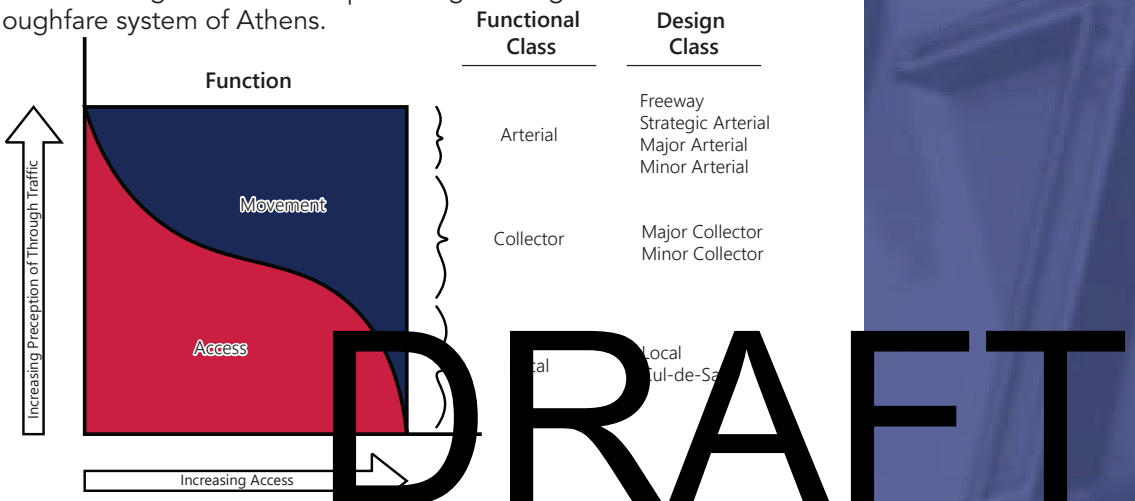
5-5 Functional Classification System

Thoroughfares are classified on a hierarchical system known as the functional classification system, which is based on the level of access and movement they provide. Access refers to the accessibility of properties from the street, and movement refers to efficiency in mobility, usually resulting in increased speed. As shown in the diagram, there are trade-offs between mobility and access. For example, local roads provide increased access to individual homes and properties but are less efficient in movement, which results in decreased speed. Conversely, highways provide efficient mobility by moving a large number of vehicles at high speeds but provide limited accessibility. The following classifications provide general guidance on the thoroughfare system of Athens.



Functional Classification System	Recommended Right-of-Way Range	Approximate Recommended Spacing
Major Arterial	100’ – 120’	1 mile
Minor Arterial	80’ – 100’	½ mile
Major / Minor Collector	70’ – 80’	¼ mile
Local	50’ – 60’	N/A

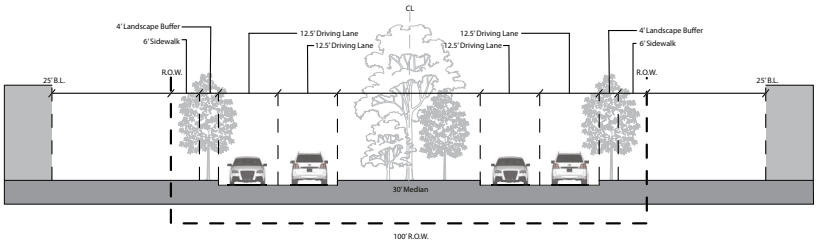
Table 5-1. Roadways classification system

Freeway/Highways

Freeways or highways are high-capacity roadways in which all direct access from adjacent properties is eliminated, and where widely spaced access ramps and interchanges control ingress and egress to the traffic lanes. In Athens, Loop 7 is classified as a freeway.

Major Arterial

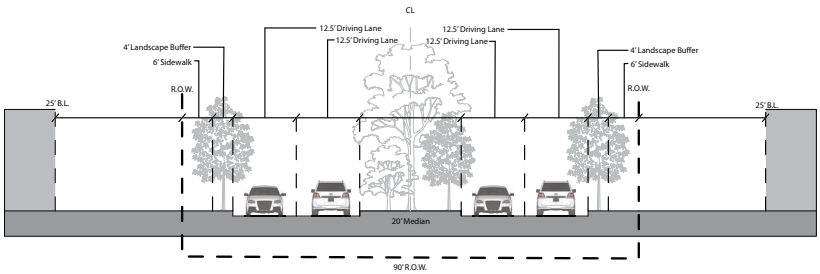
The primary urban transportation system comprises major arterials, also known as major thoroughfares, which primarily provide for continuity and high traffic volume movement between major regional activity centers. Right-of-way requirements for major arterials typically range from 100 to 120 feet in width and provide two to six lanes within the entire right-of-way. Transit service is high, while bicycle and pedestrian facilities are low in this type of roadway. Major arterials include US 175, SH31, and SH 19. Major arterials are generally recommended to be approximately 1 mile apart.



MAJOR ARTERIAL

Minor Arterial

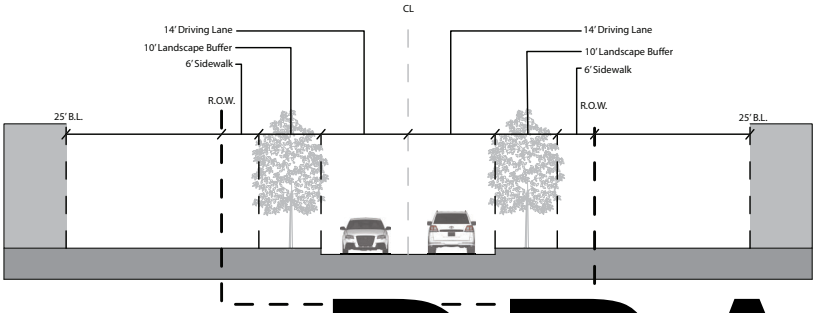
Minor arterials serve to distribute traffic from major arterials through the rest of the roadway system. Right-of-way requirements for minor arterials typically range from 80 to 100 feet and provide two to four lanes within the entire right-of-way. Transit service is high, while bicycle and pedestrian facilities are low in this type of roadway. Minor Arterials are generally recommended to be half a mile apart. Examples of minor arterials include County Road 1616 and East College Street.



MINOR ARTERIAL

Major/Minor Collector Streets

The primary function of a collector street is to collect and distribute traffic from local residential streets to a major or minor thoroughfare system. A collector street is usually located in such a manner to discourage through-traffic movements. Right-of-way requirements for collector streets typically range from 70 to 80 feet, and often four lanes are constructed within the entire right-of-way. These streets serve through traffic and provide direct access to commercial and high-density residential properties. However, these streets do not serve low-density residential properties. Transit, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities are moderate since minor arterial streets serve a more localized area. Collector Streets are generally recommended to have a spacing of approximately ½ mile.

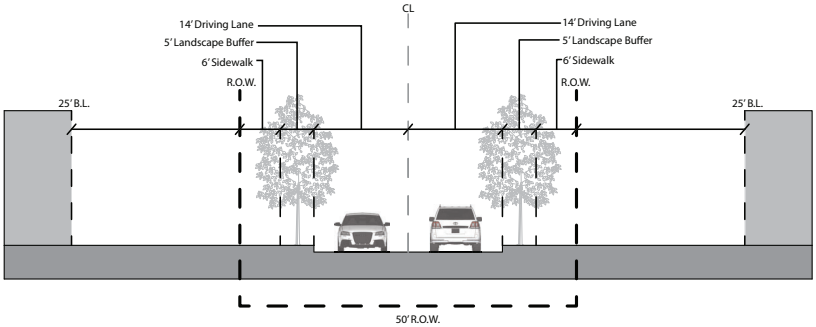


COLLECTOR

Local Streets (Residentia

Local streets consist of residential neighborhood streets that provide access to residential lots. Local streets should be arranged to discourage most through traffic, except that which is directly related to the area. The residential streets' alignment may include straight, curvilinear, discontinuous-loop, cul-de-sac, or court configuration. Local roads near the downtown area may be gridded to be compatible with the development of the area. Right-of-way width should be 50 feet for existing areas and new development should increase to 60 feet. Because only limited traffic is attracted to the residential streets, they have narrower rights-of-way than other types of streets.

It is recommended that the city prepare an in-depth transportation study that evaluates existing levels of service, traffic deficiencies, traffic forecast modeling, and provides data-driven recommendations to improve mobility in Athens.



LOCAL

6. PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

6-1 Introduction

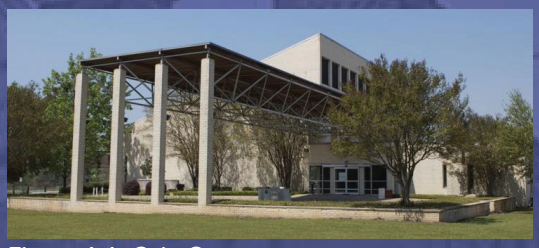


Figure 6-1. Cain Center

Figure 6-2. Cain Park

Figure 6-3. Cain Park tennis courts

Figure 6-4. Baseball game at Coleman Park

Parks and open spaces play a critical role in the social, economic, and overall health of a city and its residents. Parks encourage community engagement and social interactions by providing beautiful scenery and a place to gather and relax. They improve resident's quality of life by providing opportunities for recreation and outdoor play. Not only do these spaces increase the city's health and quality of life, but also strengthen the local economy, increase community engagement, and decrease environmental impact. According to the National Recreation and Park Association studies, parks also positively impact a person's mental health by reducing stress, depression, and anxiety. With the significant role that parks play within a city, they must be adequately planned and established to meet city goals and objectives. By planning for parks, a city can promote healthy and active lifestyles, bring connectivity to a city, and increase the economy as the city grows. It is the city's role and its Parks and Recreation Board to plan, develop, improve, and maintain all parks and recreation centers owned and operated by the city. Municipalities also play a role in the funding of parks as they allocate funds through the annual budget to different city functions, including parks. This chapter provides an inventory of the existing city parks system and other recreational amenities in Athens. This chapter also includes the Master Parks Plan, which reflects the recommendations from the 1999 Parks Master Plan in an updated map. This section intends to provide guidance in the development of a future Parks, Trails and Open Space Master Plan and other items that should be considered.

6-2 Existing City Parks and Facilities

Athens has nearly 200 acres of dedicated parks and open space. The city offers a variety of passive and active parks that each provide different recreation opportunities to the citizens of Athens. The following section provides an inventory of existing city-owned parks and other significant recreation spaces.

Cain Recreation Center and Park

Cain Park is an eighty-five-acre park and offers multiple amenities, including softball fields, tennis courts, a fishing pond, ¾ mile walking trail, and many beautiful open spaces. Within Cain Park is the Cain Center, a 49,326-square-foot recreation center that includes amenities such as a swimming pool, fitness center, basketball court, and meeting rooms.

Coleman Park

Coleman Park is a forty-acre park located southeast of the downtown area. This park is the primary athletic complex in Athens and includes multiple baseball and soccer fields allowing many games and tournaments to be played in Athens. The park was updated in 2016 to provide a new concession stand and restroom facility. In ad-

dition to the sporting facilities, Coleman Park has an outdoor pavilion open year-round and is available for park patrons to utilize.

Kiwanis Park

Kiwanis Park is located south of the downtown core and is Athens' designated children's park. This park includes various types of playground equipment, a pavilion, and the Kiwanis Park Splash Pad that is utilized during the summer months.

O.D. Baggett Park

O.D. Baggett Park is a seven-acre park that is located North of the downtown area. The park was named after Judge Baggett, who served as a City Council member and as Justice of the Peace. This park provides amenities such as basketball courts, a baseball field, a pavilion, and playground equipment.

Ginger's Park

Ginger's Park is a small pocket park located in downtown adjacent to the Henderson County Annex and the Henderson County Courthouse. This passive park provides a tranquil area with multiple seating options, offering a space for visitors to enjoy the view of downtown.

Additional City Neighborhood Parks

The city also owns Peach Park and West Park, which primarily serve as passive parks with green fields available for multi-purpose recreation. These parks are also in northwest Athens and embedded in the neighborhoods, offering an excellent opportunity for reinvestment in these areas. These parks do not currently offer any amenities so funding should be considered to enhance these areas. Enhancements may include signage, seating, playground equipment, shade structures, or sports field delineation.

Other Recreation Facilities

East Texas Arboretum and Botanical Society

The East Texas Arboretum and Botanical Society (ETABS) owns and operates a 100-acre arboretum located along US Hwy 175. The facility includes a collection of botanical gardens, historical buildings, two miles of hiking trails, and various programmed activities.

Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center

The Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center (TFFC) is a facility of the Inland Fisheries Division of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), which is the state agency charged with the management and conservation of the natural and cultural resources of Texas. This center is located on the north shore of Lake Athens and is now owned by the Texas Parks and Wildlife.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department facility has an aquatic education center, native Texas fish aquarium, and production fish hatchery. The Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center is home to almost every freshwater species of fish found in Texas and can be viewed in sim-

Figure 6-5. Kiwanis Park splash

Figure 6-6. Ginger's Park downtown

Figure 6-7. East Texas Arboretum

Figure 6-8. Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center Pond

Figure 6-9. Lake Athens

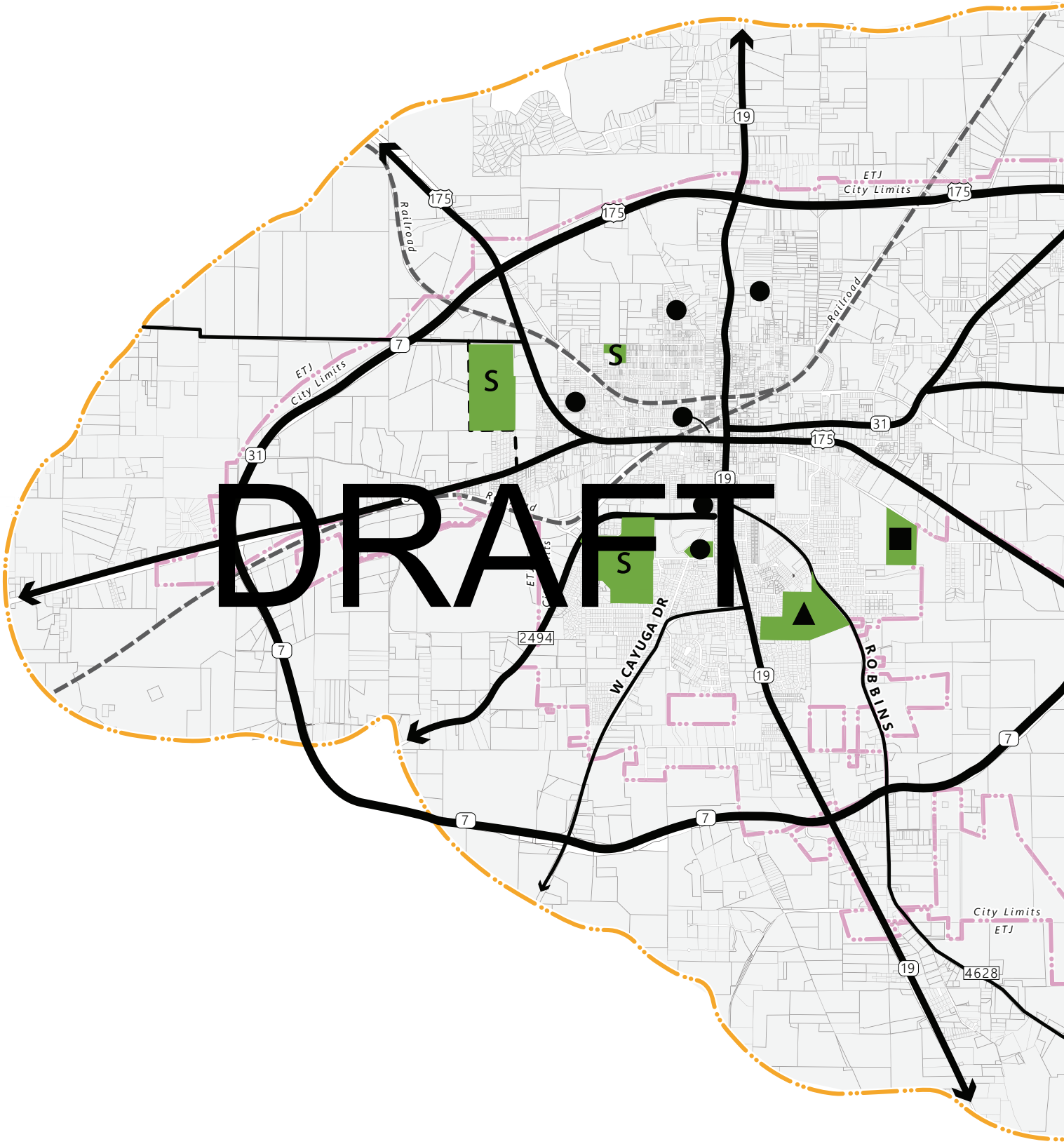
ulated natural habitats. Visitors can learn about each of the freshwater species, listen to the history of sport fishing, walk a wetlands trail, and take a narrated tram tour of the production of hatchery.

Lake Athens

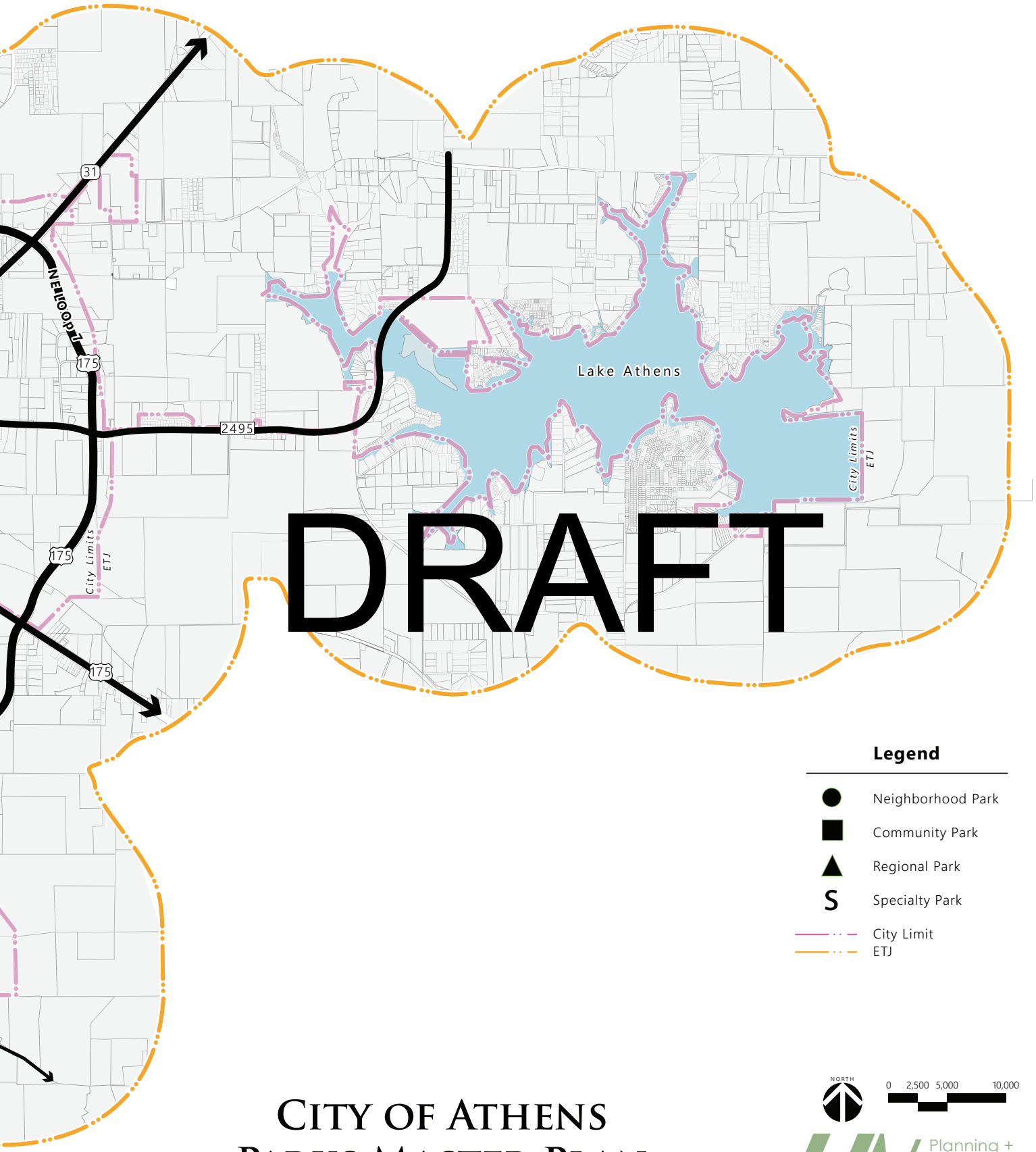
Lake Athens is a 1,799-acre reservoir located in far east Athens. The lake and its water are owned and operated by the Athens Municipal Water Authority. Lake Athens provides several recreational activities such as camping, fishing, kayaking and watersports. A public access beach area is provided along with a convenience store and restaurant overlooking the lake. RV Camping is also available near Lake Athens.

6-3 Parks and Open Space Master Plan

As mentioned in the introduction, the Parks and Open Space Master Plan included in this document mirrors the recommendations provided in the 1999 Comprehensive Plan. To determine future park needs, a separate Parks Trails, and Open Space Master Plan should be developed. This would provide a focused effort on parks, trails and open space for the city of Athens.



This map was recreated as part of the Comprehensive Plan update and reflects the 1999 Comprehensive Plan Parks & Open Space recomme



City of Athens Parks Master Plan

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Parks Classification System

The following classification system is provided in the 1999 Comprehensive Plan and is based upon the older National Parks and Recreation Association (NPRA) standards. These classifications should be reevaluated and revised and the newer NPRA Parks Metrics applied during the preparation of the future Parks, Trails and Open Space Master Plan.

Neighborhood Park

A neighborhood park is meant to serve the immediate neighborhood and provides a gathering space for residents. Facilities may include playgrounds, open space, shade structures, and other passive areas.

Community Park

A community park is larger than a neighborhood park and provides active recreation such as sports fields. Additional facilities may be included such as shade structures, open spaces, seating areas, and playground area.

Regional Park

A regional park provides recreation activities that draw a larger population and is between 50 to 200 acres in size. Activities may include large open spaces, multi-purpose sports fields, or trails. Cain Park is an example of a regional park.

Specialty Park

Specialty parks include recreation spaces such as golf courses, lakes, and botanical gardens that are not typically provided by the city. Examples of these types of parks include the East Texas Arboretum Lake Athens, and Athens Country Club golf course.

6-4 Parks Standards

The following provides guidance on the items that should be considered in a future Parks, Trails and Open Space Master Plan. A detailed analysis should be conducted to determine the level of service of existing parks and target where future parks should be located. Additional guidance for new development should also be provided and provide flexibility as development occurs to respond to market changes. A major item that should be established in the Parks, Trails and Open Space Master Plan should be the development of a parks capital improvement plan. This will help the city plan and prioritize facility improvements to existing parks and assist in the development of future parks.

Community Engagement

Public engagement should drive the process to determine the types of facilities residents want to see in future city parks. Community engagement should be interactive and target all demographic groups. Smaller parks such as Peach Park and West Park should engage residents in the immediate area since they will likely frequent the parks regularly. For larger regional parks, engagement should include a larger scope of the community.

Levels of Service

Section 6-2 lists the city's existing parks and general amenities. However, the city should develop level of service (LOS) measures or benchmarks to help determine the existing conditions of their parks

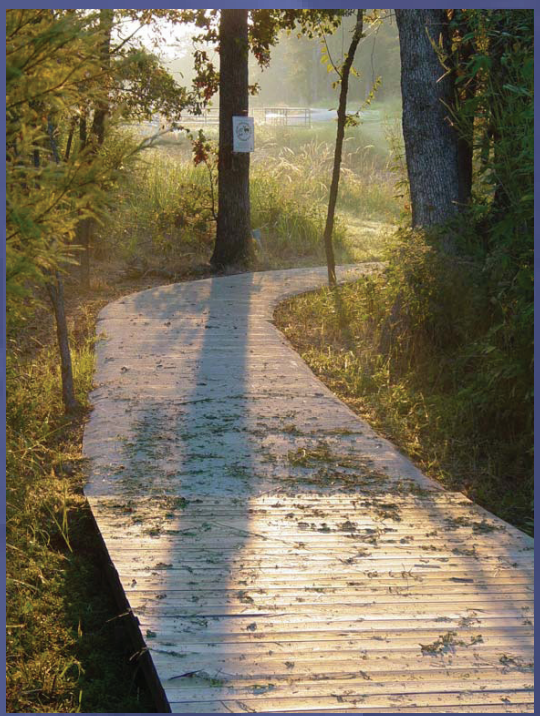

Figure 6-10. Park walkway

and how well they serve the community. LOS also helps establish and identify the types of improvements needed in existing parks. There is various level of service metrics that a community may utilize. Common level of service standards include:

LOS Metric	Purpose	Measurement Method	Considerations
Acres per Capita	Determines if a city has enough parkland	Measured as X acres of parkland per 1,000 residents	Different measurement based on park classification (neighborhood park vs regional park)
Access distance/ time	Determines accessibility of parks via different modes of transit such as driving, walking, or biking	Conduct spatial analysis for each park with each mode of transit	Rural development will have longer travel distances Higher density areas will have shorter distances
Quality	Determines quality of facilities for each park	Conditions survey for each park	Criteria should be established for each type of park to determine level of quality
Operating expenditures per Acre or Capita	Determines funding is available to manage, operate, and maintain existing and future parks	Per Acre – Divide total operating expenditures by parkland acres Per Capita – Divide total operating expenditures by population	Operating expenditures should include costs such as personnel salaries, equipment, materials, etc.

Table 6-1. Source: American Planning Association PAS Memo May/June 2016: Alternatives for Determining Parks and Recreation Levels of Service

Park Diversity

The diversity of parks is another factor that cities should be considering, as a diverse selection of parks is needed to meet the community's needs and provide a wide range of activities in which residents can participate. There are two types of parks usually found in cities, which are active and passive parks. Active parks and recreation require intensive development and equipment, promote physical development, and are typically performed in groups. Active parks include playground activities and field and sport courts like baseball and tennis. On the other hand, passive parks refer to informal open spaces that allow leisure activities and do not require intensive development resulting in a low level of development. Passive parks include walking and biking trails, picnic areas, pocket parks, and boating areas.

Needs Based Assessment

A needs-based assessment utilizes the results of existing conditions analysis and community engagement to determine the gaps in existing parks and the community's future needs. It helps determine the types of facilities needed such as specific types of sports fields based on the demographics of the community or other types of necessary facilities.

Classifications

The existing parks classification system should be evaluated to determine if the existing categories are appropriate. Based on Athens' size, fewer classifications may be appropriate, or the parks size recommendations may be modified.

Implementation Plan

Based on the result of the needs assessment in combination with public engagement, a detailed capital improvements plan should be developed. Timeframes, funding recommendations, and prioritization should also be considered.

The above items should be considered as part of the development of the Parks, Trails, and Open Space Master Plan.

7. INFRASTRUCTURE

7-1 Introduction

The City of Athens is responsible for providing good streets, potable water, and an effective sewer system. These infrastructure systems are equally important in providing essential services to critical facilities located within the city, including the UT Health Hospital, other critical healthcare facilities, Henderson County facilities, and schools. A severe service disruption can trigger a cascading series of actions more significant than a simple inconvenience. Many of the systems within the city have been in place for a long time and in many cases, are reaching the end of useful life. These aging systems must be replaced or improved to match the city's development requirements. For the City of Athens to keep up with the demands on its aging infrastructure, capital improvement plans will have to be adopted and implemented over the next one, five, and ten-year periods.

One way for the City to track the age, type, condition, and location of its infrastructure is to develop and maintain an inventory of the existing systems, including the street network, water system and sewer system. Those inventories are then be used in master planning efforts that contribute to developing Capital Improvement Programs (CIP). Streets are discussed in detail in the Mobility section, which includes a recommendation for a Master Thoroughfare Plan. This plan would include recommendations for existing and future road improvements over the next one, five, and ten-year periods.

Figure 7-1. Athens Water Treatment Plant

7-2 Potable Water Systems

The City of Athens operates and maintains a potable water distribution system. This includes two small Ground Water Pump Stations (GWPS), three elevated storage tanks, and the network of underground piping throughout the city used for delivering service to customers. An engineering consultant, Garver, prepared a water distribution model for the city in 2017. This water model will be the basis for a water distribution master plan and is currently being used by waterline designers when recommending improvements to the current system. The city currently implements a five-year capital improvement plan for the water distribution system, but this is based on replacement of old or poorly performing lines and does not include improvement for future or potential development.

The Athens Municipal Water Authority (AMWA) owns a Surface Water Treatment Plant (SWTP) near Lake Athens and a GWPS located on the SWTP site. A contractual agreement between AMWA and the City provides for City operation of those facilities to deliver potable water into the City's distribution system. An additional GWPS is currently being constructed by AMWA approximately one mile west of the existing SWTP and will connect directly to one of the existing water transmission pipelines servicing the city. The independence of the additional GWPS from the SWTP provides redundancy that helps ensure the continuity of water service to the citizens.

Figure 7-2. Scott Street Water Storage Tank Rehabilitation

Figure 7-3. Athens wastwater treatment plant

Figure 7-4. Lift station

Figure 7-5. Sewer pipeline

A water system master plan has not been developed but should be considered over the next year. The preparation of a water model, along with work presently being done to record infrastructure asset information into a GIS database and the use of work management systems, will help in preparing a master plan and preparing future CIP projects. These efforts are needed to help the City of Athens and AMWA prioritize near and long-term projects and to secure the funding needed for their construction.

Providing basic services is critical to the operation of several facilities within the city, including the Justice Center (County Jail), UT Health Athens, other critical healthcare-related facilities, and many schools and government offices.

7-3 Wastewater Systems

The Athens sanitary sewer system consists of two Wastewater Treatment Plants (WWTP), twenty-three lift stations, and a network of underground pipeline and related appurtenances. The West WWTP and North WWTP have a rated capacity of 1.367 millions gallons/day (mgd) and 1.027 mgd, respectively. Basically, two distinct systems operate within the City with each WWTP serving its dedicated collection system and lift stations. Neither of the two WWTP facilities have seen improvements since 2001.

The WWTP facilities were constructed in the late 1950's and early 1960's and have seen improvements at different times to expand them to their current rated capacities. Some of the earlier treatment processes that have remained in use are now in poor condition because of age and the corrosiveness of the environment. A wastewater treatment plant master plan is being prepared by Plummer Associates, an engineering consultant, to take an in-depth look at both facilities. The master plan will consider current and future capacities and operation and maintenance (O&M) costs to recommend how the City should proceed with WWTP improvements.

While the collection system is functional, much of it is constructed using vitrified clay tile (VCT) pipe. This material is known for significantly contributing to infiltration, creating high peak flows through downstream processes during rain events. Future CIP projects should include evaluation surveys to determine dry and wet-weather flows, and the capacities of each pipe segment. The survey recommendations and GIS mapping efforts will help with modeling and master planning tasks to be used as a guide for future development and preparing CIP projects. The current five-year CIP, adopted by City Council annually for sanitary sewer projects, currently includes replacing poorly performing sections known anecdotally to utility workers or extremely old lift station equipment.

7- 4 Storm Drain and Floodplain

The primary streets inside the city limits of Athens are state maintained facilities. The drainage systems installed along these roadways are also state maintained. The City of Athens owns, operates, and maintains small, isolated storm drainage systems found in several of the residential subdivisions, however, a complete inventory of the infrastructure does not exist. The City will need to develop a map of storm drainage infrastructure which can be used to develop a drainage master plan and a Capital Improvement Program.

In conjunction with the drainage master plan, significant work will need to be done to identify floodplain areas. The current floodplain maps were adopted in April 2010 during the county-wide map update. The existing maps show 4.9 miles of fully studied stream centerline within the city limits. There is an additional 17.1 miles of stream centerline with only base level engineering and another 14.2 miles unstudied. Based on this data, only 13.5% of stream centerlines have been studied in detail with base flood elevations identified and mapped. The identification of FEMA regulated floodplain is extremely important with regard to the future development of the city. Commitment and monetary investment must be made in the detailed engineering work necessary to identify and map the floodplain areas.

Figure 7-6. Storm drain

8. IMPLEMENTATION

8-1 Introduction

The adoption of this comprehensive plan is the first step in planning for Athens' future. City staff and elected officials will utilize this plan as they make everyday decisions, ultimately affecting the built environment and quality of life in Athens. The implementation of this plan is crucial for the success of Athens.

The following recommendations result from collaboration with city staff, City Council, and community input and reflect the community goals established in this plan. The recommendations follow the SMART approach (Doran, 1981) – Specific (S), Measurable (M), Attainable (A), Relevant (R), and Timebound (T) – so that every goal can have a specific deliverable, which can be measured. Using this approach will ensure that the city will have a greater probability of accomplishing its goals and adopting necessary policies.

The action items in Table 8-1, are categorized by topic, establish a priority, and provide guidance on how the action will be accomplished. Priority is noted as "high", "medium", "low", and "on-going". High priority refers to a time frame of 0-5 years, medium priority refers to a time frame of 5-10 years, and long term refers to a time frame of 10-20 years. Ongoing refers to a recurring action or program. The implementation tool column provides guidance on how the action will be completed – study, partnership, regulation, or program.

The priority level for each action item was determined by the level of need for each item and the types of studies that should be completed before creating policy. While multiple items are identified as high priority, it might not be feasible to initiate multiple high-priority action items at once. City staff will need direction from City Council on which high-priority items should be initiated because of the cost and effort associated with each action. Staff should also aim to implement action items that are considered "low hanging fruit" that can be easily executed within a short time frame.

Planning is a continuous process, so this comprehensive plan is designed to be modified to keep up with an ever-changing environment. Changes in the environment, market, or culture, are impossible to predict during the preparation of this plan, which is why it is important to routinely evaluate and update the document. The adaptability of this plan will allow Athens to be proactive when changes and issues within the city arise. Comprehensive Plans are prepared with the city's future and growth at the forefront. The recommendations made in this section will be prioritized based on the community's needs but may be reevaluated and prioritized throughout the life of this document. It is recommended that the city adapt the comprehensive plan as needed and reevaluate it every 10 years for a minor update, at minimum. However, if the city feels, the comprehensive plan still serves the needs of the city, a minor update may not be necessary. In twenty years, most of the recommendations made by this implementation plan should ideally be in place and others in progress.

8-2 Action Items

ACTION ITEM	PRIORITY	IMPLEMENTATION TOOL
OVERALL		
Apply for state and federal grants that will aid the city in implementation of the comprehensive plan and future master plans.	Ongoing	Program
Explore marketing partnerships with agencies like Travel Texas to promote Athens as a tourist destination.	Ongoing	Partnership
Continue partnering with Athens Economic Development Corporation for strategic recruitment of target industries.	Ongoing	Partnership
Establish a brand identity that will provide cohesive image for Athens. Once established, the city may implement unique wayfinding signage, gateway features, and marketing materials.	High	Program/Study
Establish and maintain relationship with local educational institutions such as Athens ISD and Trinity Valley Community College.	Ongoing	Partnership
Prepare and present an annual progress report to City Council & Planning and Zoning Commission detailing the progress of Comprehensive Plan implementation.	Ongoing	Program
Continue informing the public of major policy decisions to be heard by City Council via the city's website and other notification tools.	Ongoing	Program
FUTURE LAND USE		
Adopt a Downtown Master Plan that promotes pedestrian connectivity, event programming, and reinvestment in downtown.	High	Study
Establish a staff-initiated Future Land Use Map amendment process annually, depending on the amount of development, to reflect development and zoning changes.	High	Regulation
Revise existing zoning districts or establish new zoning districts to implement the future land use categories.	High	Regulation
Utilize Planned Development overlay districts as a tool to implement Growth Districts as the city receives development proposals for these strategic areas.	Ongoing	Regulation
Consider membership or partnerships with agencies like the Texas Downtown Association and Texas Main Street Program for guidance on downtown revitalization best practices and grant opportunities.	Ongoing	Partnership
Update 2017 Airport Master Plan that plans for future expansion of the airport and provides a project list of the improvements needed and timeframe.	High	Study
Explore the creation of residential reinvestment programs to help improve facades or other housing improvements.	Medium	Program
Explore different type of incentive opportunities such as, waived review fees or other methods, to encourage development within the city limits.		
MOBILITY		
Adopt a Mobility Master Plan that promotes connectivity and goals outlined in the comprehensive plan. The master plan should evaluate the existing levels of service, mobility best practices, traffic deficiencies, and utilize data-driven recommendations to identify future capital improvements.	High	Study
Develop a Capital Improvement Plan that identifies 1, 5, and 10-year capital improvement projects. Examples of capital improvements may include road rehabilitation, sidewalk construction, park improvements, city facility rehabilitation, and utility infrastructure upsizing or extension. This program should be evaluated annually and prioritized with the direction of City Council and Public Works.	High	Program
Incorporate recommendations of the future Master Mobility Plan into the Capital Improvements Plan in coordination with other master plans. Coordination should occur during construction of adjacent projects to incorporate multi-modal improvements.	Medium	Program
Revise the city's street and right-of-way requirements and other city documents to be consistent with the outcome of the future Mobility Master Plan recommendations. Sufficient right-of-way acquisition should be determined to plan for ultimate roadway configurations.	High	Regulation
Maintain and enhance coordination with Henderson County and state agencies such as TxDOT during the planning process to maximize resources, receive funding, and coordinate connectivity between the city and county.	Ongoing	Partnership
Monitor and apply for federal and state transportation funding grants.	Ongoing	Program
Ensure that development proposals and transportation documents align with the mobility principles and reflect the vision that this section describes for transportation	Medium	Regulation

PARKS & OPEN SPACE		
Adopt a Parks, Trails, and Open Space Master Plan that reflects community parks needs and preferences with robust public engagement. The plan should establish level of service metrics and include a detailed project list identifying future park needs and improvements. Location of trails should also be determined.	High	Study
Include capital improvement recommendations of the future Parks, Open Space, and Trails Master Plan into the Capital Improvement Plan such as proposed parks, existing park enhancement, and trail construction.	Medium	Program
Conduct a sidewalk inventory and assessment study to establish the current sidewalk network and condition and determine near-term sidewalk connections. This study can be conducted independently or as part of developing the Parks Master Plan.	High	Study
Actively monitor and apply for funding from various state agencies. A city staff employee or third party should be hired as a grant writer to actively monitor and apply for eligible parks and trails funding from various state agencies. Agencies may include Texas Department of Agriculture and Texas Parks and Wildlife.	Ongoing	Program
Maintain relationships and communication with the East Arboretum and Botanical Society and Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center and help promote these areas as destinations for visitors.	Ongoing	Partnership
Consider membership or partnerships with agencies such as Keep Texas Beautiful for beautification grants.	Ongoing	Partnership
INFRASTRUCTURE & FACILITIES		
Adopt a Water Master Plan	High	Study
Adopt a Wastewater Master Plan	High	Study
Adopt a Drainage Master Plan	High	Study
Initiate a conditions assessment of city facilities, including buildings such as city hall and public safety buildings, to determine a rehabilitation timeline and incorporate it into the CIP program.	Medium	Study
Add future facilities and building rehabilitation to the CIP program as recommended in the Water and Wastewater Master plans	Medium	Program
Continue building a GIS database that records infrastructure asset information and work management systems to utilize in the development of the future Water and Wastewater Master Plans.	High	Study
Create a storm drainage infrastructure GIS database as an independent exercise or as part of the development of a future Drainage Master identifying ownership and maintenance responsibility.	Medium	Study
Conduct an evaluation survey to determine dry and wet-weather flows and capacities of each pipe segments. This exercise will assist staff in the preparation of the CIP program.	Medium	Study

Table 8-1. Implementation process